



**AN EXPLORATION OF THE MOTIVATIONS FOR USING MODERNISED  
AFROCENTRIC FASHION DESIGNS TO ESTABLISH PERSONAL BRANDS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of personal branding is the achievement of goals and the gratification of needs. Some individuals use modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs, which are becoming commonplace in the global fashion industry, to build their personal brands. In this qualitative study, a deeper understanding was sought regarding the motivations of these individuals for using Afrocentric fashions and whether it, apart from being used for professional/commercial purposes, also fulfil personal and social needs. The interpretative study was approached from a symbolic interactionism viewpoint and theories such as identity management and social media engagement, as well as existing literature and previous studies on the topic were used to develop a conceptual framework for the study. In-depth personal interviews were conducted with a sample of young South Africans who purposefully choose to use modernised Afrocentric fashions for establishing and building their personal brands. The verbatim transcriptions of the interviews were analysed and interpreted by using a thematic analysis. Motivations for using Afrocentric fashions to build personal brands were found to be professional/commercial of nature, but a strong link was also found to personal and social gratifications of participants. Findings included inter alia that these fashion designs are used because they affirm the participants' identities and facilitate a sense of unity - interpersonal connection with other like-minded individuals who share the same goal of advancing Africanism. It was also found that although most of the participants do not know the specific meanings of the symbols anymore, they are aware of the intrinsic significance of the clothing to communicate their sense of pride in their African heritage. The contributions of the study are rooted in a deeper understanding of the topic's multiple facets. Apart from identifying the fulfilment of professional/commercial needs, identifying the fulfilment of personal and social goals was especially significant. A limitation of the study may be a small sample size, but the purpose of the study was to gain an in-depth and rich understanding of the topic and not to generalise the results.

Recommendations are made for future research on this topic.

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this Master of Arts thesis submitted to the IIE is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another university or higher education institution for a degree.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Erika', with a stylized, cursive script.

Signature:

Print name: **ERIKA BUTETSI BUGAARI BALINTULO**

Date: 20 October 2019

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION**

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Afrocentric fashion symbols in modern fashion designs have gained an increasing presence in the global fashion industry (Jennings, 2011). Evans (2015) defines Afrocentric fashion as clothing styles and trends worn by the people of Africa, those of African descent and others who can appreciate the beauty and meaning of this type of African garb. Afrocentric fashion is inclusive of African prints and patterns made from an array of materials, such as beads, the mud cloth, barkcloth, kitenge, kente and many others (Adeniyi, 2013). Traditional Afrocentric fashion consists of traditional African garments or items that are regarded as a national dress and which are specifically used to mark special occasions or ceremonies. Figure 1 below illustrates this.



Figure 1: Debley, T. 2011.

*A Malian man from the Bamana tribe wearing his traditional mud cloth (Bogolanfini) attire.*  
([www.tdebleyreflections.blogspot.com](http://www.tdebleyreflections.blogspot.com), 2011)

According to Luke-Boone (2001:8), mud cloth existed as far back as the 12th century. Traditionally, mud cloth was made by the Bamana tribe dyeing mud in various colours and marking a piece of fabric with traditional motifs that symbolise various significant milestones in their culture, such as marriage or circumcision (Toerien, 2010). The meanings attached to the pieces of fabric differ based on the area of origin and the meanings are passed on from mother to child. The Bamana tribe hold high significance with the mud cloth as it is a way of communicating and telling stories of their heritage amongst themselves. According to Evans (2017), a variety of styles - based on different regions of the continent and the type of cloth used – play a pivotal role in the fashioning of the traditional African garment.

Modernised Afrocentric fashion design, on the other hand, can be defined as the modern-day interpretation of African fashion. It entails taking traditional and traditional-inspired fabrics and accessories and creating cuts and designs that follow current trends in the fashion industry (Mosiane, 2017).

Clarke (2001) states that mud cloth is one of the most popular fabrics originating from Africa on the western market. The fabric has become more commercialised and rather than the intrinsic procedure used to create the traditional pieces of mud cloth, machines are mass producing the fabric for the commercial market (Brown, 2015). International fashion designers are taking inspiration from the mud cloth material and creating modern and fashionable pieces that may appeal to the mass market (Toerien, 2010). Figure 2 below illustrates this.



Figure 2: Mistry, M. 2011.

*A fashion model walking the runway in a mud cloth inspired dress, made by internationally acclaimed brand Sass & Bide, for the fall 2011 ready-to-wear collection. (Vogue.com, 2011)*

Personal branding entails marketing oneself to society (Brooks & Anumudu, 2015). It is also described as an ongoing process of establishing a prescribed image or impression

in the mind of others about an individual, group or organisation (Ellis, 2009). Montoya and Vandehey (2009:1) define a personal brand as the absolute and persuasive public image attached to an individual that serves as a reflection of his or her values, quality, personality and experiences. These characteristics highlight individuals' uniqueness and enable them to be differentiated from others. In this study the focus was on individuals who purposefully choose to wear modernised Afrocentric designs to build their personal brands. Previously, personal branding has been associated exclusively with celebrities, politicians, and individuals who wish to succeed in their careers (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011). However, with the present rise in the use and connectivity of social media, personal branding has evolved to include everyday people who communicate certain messages not only via their everyday appearance during face-to-face interactions, but also via sharing personalised content on their social media pages (Hietajärvi, 2012).

According to Peters (1997) and Kaputa (2003), all individuals have the ability to brand themselves. Kaputa (2003) asserts that it is necessary to create a personal brand for oneself because if one does not control one's personal image and how it is perceived, observers will create a personal brand on one's behalf. Globalisation has created a wider platform for people to portray themselves and this has inevitably increased competition and resulted in a need to identify and implement a differentiator that enables people to set themselves apart from the crowd (Brooks & Anumudu, 2016). This has in turn led to the rise of the personal branding phenomenon. Existing literature studies focus on the use of personal branding to achieve professional success and suggest that individuals who establish personal brands are more likely to attain professional success as opposed to individuals who do not (McCorkle, 1992; Clare, 2002; Ghel, 2011; Shepherd, 2005). There is still a lack in literature regarding the relationship between personal branding and the fulfillment of other goals.

This study focused on the use of Afrocentric fashion symbols in modern fashion designs to establish a personal brand. It explored why individuals choose to associate

themselves with these specific symbols and what the symbols may mean to them. Once people have established Afrocentric fashion symbols into their personal brands, it becomes part of their lifestyle and therefore they begin to interact exclusively with fashion brands that imbue Afrocentric ideals (Montoya & Vandehey 2009; McLeod, 2014). Apart from uncovering other, perhaps more personal, motivations for choosing Afrocentric fashion symbols in modern fashion designs, the results of the study may enable designers who have Afrocentric centered fashion brands to identify these motivations and use them to attract and retain potential consumers, which would then increase the brand's efficiency and in the long term, also the profit. The use of Afrocentric fashion symbols may ensure that the produced products will be purchased, especially by a specific group of people who exclusively identify with the brand or with different aspects of the brand (Hubbard, 2019).

The next section provides the contextualisation for the study, including the purpose of the study and the problem statement. An explanation of the key terms that were used in the study is provided, as well as the research approach and methodology that were followed. Ethical considerations are also addressed.

## **1.2 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

### **1.2.1 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study was firstly to explore why Afrocentric fashion influencers purposefully use modernised Afrocentric fashion designs to enhance their personal brands, and secondly, to explore whether the use of these designs in personal brands, apart from being used for professional/commercial purposes, also fulfil personal and social needs.

### **1.2.2 Rationale and background for the study**

Afrocentric fashion symbols are increasingly seen across all types of designs, including furniture, interior decorating, jewelry, hairstyles, face and body painting, makeup, tattoos, textile designs, clothes and so forth (Jennings, 2011). It is important to note that symbols in general (and for this study specifically Afrocentric symbols) are very powerful because their meanings often lie on a deep psychological level (Jung, 1947; McLeod, 2014).

As mentioned above, personal branding is a practice where individuals market themselves and their careers as brands. By continuously engaging with modernised Afrocentric fashion designs, people create a perception about themselves in the eyes of observers, which presents a reflection of their personalities, beliefs and values, amongst others (Chittenden, 2009). It was found by Wilson and Gilligan (2005) and by Dorrance (2011) that young, urban South Africans who choose to integrate modernised Afrocentric fashion designs into their personal brands are well-informed and well-connected individuals, who have a wide variety of information sources at their disposal through various channels, such as different social media platforms. According to Dorrance (2011), these individuals are highly opinionated and often quick to share their thoughts and expressions personally and openly, through interpersonal face-to-face interaction, as well as through social media. They rely on appearance and the nonverbal communication aspects of a clothing style to present themselves and their personal beliefs across a wide scope. It may thus be possible that a finding of this study could for example be that individuals who choose to actively integrate modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols into their personal brands may do so to portray a sense of freedom and a need for self-expression, or a strong sense of self-awareness.

The question arose whether these individuals are consciously aware of the symbolic

values attached to Afrocentric symbols and whether they purposefully use these symbolic values imbedded in modernised Afrocentric fashion designs to build their personal brands. One of the questions that inspired this study, was whether they experience a deep cultural identification with designs displaying Afrocentric symbols because the symbols speak to their inner core, root and desires. For example, do they experience that a certain symbol evokes a feeling of freedom and wildness? To express such a feeling through clothing choices may be quite different from using a new fashion trend simply because the look appeals to them (Todorović, Toporišič & Pavko Čuden, 2014). Another question is whether they consciously choose to apply modernised Afrocentric designs to portray certain personal characteristics to others or to fulfill specific personal needs. In other words, does wearing certain fashions facilitate the creation of a certain impression about the wearer in the minds of other people and does that result in the fulfillment of other personal needs for the wearer? (Howlett, Pine, Orakcioglu & Fletcher, 2013). This kind of knowledge that entails identification with certain symbols cannot be gained from investigating ordinary modern fashion designs that do not display cultural symbols.

### **1.2.3 Relevance of the study**

Afrocentric fashion has shifted from being preserved by Africans to maintain the cultural symbolism and significance of African cultures to a position where certain elements and aspects from these cultures are now borrowed by international fashion designers. This is evident from its increasing presence on international runways and in fashion collections, as well as on the Internet and social media (Rovine, 2013; Jennings, 2015).

According to Rovine (2013), Western designers are borrowing various aspects without directly referencing Africa as their source of inspiration. Cultural appropriation occurs in clothing and fashion when international designers create interest and trends in their

collections by using borrowed motifs from less well-known cultures (Rovine, 2013; Yost, 2013). Cultural appropriation therefore refers to “the takings from a culture that is not of one’s own cultural expressions or artefacts, history and ways of knowledge” (Schneider, 2003: 215). The appropriation of fashion symbols enables individuals to be exposed to different motifs that they may not be exposed to in their own cultures. It also affords a unique opportunity to the fashion industry to create trends that are relatable across various segments within the market (Ventures Africa, 2014). Some individuals who identify with Afrocentric fashion symbols use fashion designs that incorporate these symbols in order to nonverbally express and establish their own personal brands. These symbols can then be interpreted and understood across various markets, that perhaps previously did not understand their meaning or significance (Ventures Africa, 2014).

People follow values that guide and influence their behaviour (Chittenden, 2009). An individual’s choice of clothing is a form of nonverbal communication and an indication of the person’s unique values, attitudes, lifestyle and interests amongst others. Clothing choices thus allow perceivers to formulate opinions or have insight into the wearer’s personal values (Damhorst, 1992; Howlett et al, 2013). Through the choice of clothing, people may not only communicate certain principles, but can also identify with others who share similar values and attitudes (Beatty, Kahle, Homer & Misra, 1985).

Clothing thus plays a significant role in personal branding as it is a form of self-presentation that is daily portrayed by an individual and witnessed by the public (Howlett et al, 2013). Although other studies do address the topic of this study (McCorkle 1992; Clare, 2002; Shepherd, 2005), there is a caveat regarding information on the motivations for the specific choice of clothing that individuals use to represent themselves, in this case, fashion incorporating modernised Afrocentric symbols. As previously stated, the concept of modernised Afrocentric fashion designs is relatively new and still evolving, therefore the purpose of this study was to achieve additional insight and understanding in this regard (one of the goals of qualitative research). The

value of the study entails the attainment of a deeper insight into the significance of symbolism within personal branding and the meanings attached to certain symbols, which may lead to an enhancement of brand loyalty and 'living' the brand. The ultimate aim was to make a contribution to existing literature regarding the use of clothing choices and fashions to build personal brands.

An exploration of the motivations of young, urban South Africans, representing active/overt personal brands, for using modernised Afrocentric fashion designs to build their personal brands, will provide thick, descriptive data that may enhance insight into the needs of young South Africans, and may lead the fashion industry to new insights and a deeper understanding of the purchasing behaviour of their target markets (Babbie, 2014).

The study commenced by briefly investigating how Afrocentric symbols are appropriated in modern fashion designs, after which it explored why young, urban South Africans purposefully use these modernised symbols and designs to build their own personal brands.

#### **1.2.4 Problem Statement**

Most of the existing research into the functions of personal brands, is from the perspective of achieving **professional** goals, such as defining one's strongest attributes and marketing one's products (McCorkle 1992; Clare, 2002; Shepherd, 2005). However, there is still a caveat regarding whether the use of modernised Afrocentric designs in personal brands, apart from being used for professional/commercial purposes, also fulfil personal or social needs.

## **1.3 CONCEPTUALISATION OF KEY TERMS**

### **1.3.1 Afrocentric fashion**

Afrocentric fashion is characterised by clothing styles and trends worn by people of Africa, those of African descent and others who appreciate the beauty and meaning of this type of African garb (Evans, 2017). Afrocentric fashion is inclusive of African prints and patterns made from an array of materials, such as beads, mud cloth, barkcloth, kitenge, kente and many others (Van Dyk, 2015). The fabrics used to make Afrocentric fashion designs contain specific patterns and symbols that carry meaning for the people of the areas from which they originate, for example, the Ndebele of southern Africa create abstract geometric shapes on their fabrics to demonstrate their creativity and individuality (Clark, 2009).

### **1.3.2 Traditional Afrocentric fashion**

Traditional Afrocentric fashion consists of traditional African garments or items that are regarded as a national dress and specifically used to mark special occasions or ceremonies. A variety of styles are based on different regions of the continent. The type of cloth used play a pivotal role in the fashioning of the garment (Khaminwa, 2015; Evans, 2017). This is further illustrated in figure 3 below.



Figure 3: Setso, T. 2020.  
*A woman wearing the traditional Ndebele wedding attire. (tsasetso.co.za, 2020)*

### 1.3.3 Modernised Afrocentric fashion design

Modernised Afrocentric fashion design entails the modern-day interpretation of African fashion. It entails taking traditional and traditional-inspired fabrics and accessories and creating cuts and designs out of it that follow current trends in the fashion industry (Lamutamu, 2011; Mosiane, 2017). Figure 4 below depicts this.



Figure 4: Thabete, T. 2019.  
*South African celebrity Thando Thabete wearing a dress inspired by the Ndebele tribe of South Africa. (www.instagram.com, 2019)*

#### **1.3.4 Africanism**

A term referring to the aspects of African culture that can be traced through societal

practices and traditions of the African diaspora (Sandile, 2015). It also refers to the condition of being African, descending from African ancestry and having a mental attitude that feeds into African ideologies and beliefs (Asante, 2005; Sandile, 2015).

### **1.3.5 Cultural appropriation**

This can be defined as “the takings from a culture that is not one’s own cultural expressions or artefacts, history and ways of knowledge” (Schneider, 2003). In this study, cultural appropriation refers to how Afrocentric fashion symbols are being portrayed in modernised Afrocentric fashion designs.

### **1.3.6 Brand**

A brand’s main aim is to create a lasting impression and it can be defined as a set of tools utilised by a company to promote its products and offerings with the intention of future profit. A brand’s identity consists of its core identity, including attributes and symbols (Gallagher & Savard, 2009). In this study, the investigation of personal brands relates to modernised Afrocentric fashion designs.

### **1.3.7 Personal branding**

Personal branding is practised by people marketing themselves and their careers as brands. It refers to the ongoing process of establishing a prescribed image or impression in the mind of others about an individual, group or organisation (Ellis, 2009; Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2012). It incorporates aspects such as brand identity and brand image, from which personal brand identity and personal brand image have developed.

#### **1.3.7.1 Personal brand identity**

The meaning of personal brand identity can be derived from the definition of brand identity. Aaker (1996) states that “brand identity refers to the unique sets of associations to address what the brand stands for and convey brand promises to the consumers and stakeholders”. Personal brand identity can therefore be defined as the personal cues that individuals present to establish themselves within society. In this study, personal brand identity refers to the choices of young South Africans who represent active/overt personal brands to interact with modernised Afrocentric fashion designs and what these designs may communicate about them.

#### **1.3.7.2 Personal brand image**

Personal brand image stems from the concept of brand image. According to Aaker (1996), brand image is concerned with consumers’ perception of the brand. Personal brand image would therefore entail the perception that the public has of individuals based on how they portray themselves. In this study, personal brand image relates to how young South Africans who represent active/overt personal brands choose to dress and portray themselves to the public.

#### **1.3.8 Identity Management**

Identity management is concerned with an individual’s self-image as presented to the public (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Cupach and Imahori, 1993; Wiserman & Koester, 1993). In this study, identity management refers to the incorporation of modernised Afrocentric fashion designs into people’s personal styles in order to express themselves and influence the public’s perceptions of them.

### **1.3.9 Self-awareness**

Self-aware individuals have a complete understanding of who they are, and how they may be similar or different from others (Kircher & David, 2003; Dierdorff & Rubin, 2017; Legrain, Cleeremans, & Dest-rebecqz, 2010). In this study, self-awareness refers to individuals establishing their personal brands to highlight their uniqueness.

### **1.3.10 Self-presentation**

Self-presentation is a process whereby individuals use certain behaviours to communicate information about themselves in an attempt to control the way in which they are perceived by others (Leary 1996; Ellison, Heino & Gibbs 2006). In this study, self-presentation refers to the incorporation of modernised Afrocentric fashion designs into the clothing choices of young South Africans who represent active/overt personal brands.

## **1.4 TYPE OF STUDY**

### **1.4.1 Interpretivist Paradigm**

This study can be labelled as an Interpretive study. According to interpretive researchers, such as Walsham (1993), Hussey (2009), and Myers (2009), reality is based on individuals' own personal experiences of their external world. Myers (2009) is of the view that reality is formed through an individual's social constructions, such as shared meanings and language, therefore reality is considered to be a social construct. Walsham (1993) states that interpretive theory is not based on any one particular

theory, but rather on the collective agreement of those in the same field of research. The interpretive approach creates an understanding based on the meanings that individuals attach to experiences (Deetz, 1996). Therefore, according to this approach, individuals may choose to represent themselves through modern Afrocentric fashion designs as a means to connect with like-minded people who may share the same worldview based on past experiences, such as a shared cultural background.

The interpretivist paradigm rests on the basic idea that people fundamentally differ from objects. Unlike objects, human beings constantly evolve based on their environment (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014). The main aim of interpretivism is to gain an in-depth understanding of social behaviours through studying social interactions (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014). In this case, the focus was on the interaction of young entrepreneurs with modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs in developing personal brands. An interpretivist approach was used because the study aimed to understand why these symbols and designs have encouraged individuals to incorporate them into their personal brands. In order to achieve this, the in-depth interviews were conducted with a selection of young, urban South Africans who represent active/overt personal brands, and who use modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols in modern fashion designs to build their own personal brands.

Collins and Hussey (2009) state that interpretive researchers integrate themselves in their studies, as they are unable to separate themselves from their own subjective realities. During the personal interviews, it was strived to stay neutral since the goal was to understand the participants' responses from the perspective of their own life-worlds and experiences. In order to ensure a clear understanding, the participants were asked to elaborate on their answers if they were not quite clear. The focus of the interviews was to uncover how the participants perceive their motivations regarding clothing choices, thus - their own subjective perceptions of their realities and their social

contexts were related.

#### **1.4.1.1 Ontological position of Interpretivism**

Ontology is the study of being or reality and is mainly concerned with what reality is and how we know what is real (Hussey, 2009; Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). The ontological position of Interpretivism states that numerous realities exist as each individual live in his/her own reality, therefore making reality subjective (Hussey, 2009). Interpretivists believe that reality is socially constructed and meaning is dependent on an individual's past experiences and interactions. Reality, therefore, is constantly changing according to one's perceptions and due to the difference in people's cultures, environments and circumstances, with the result that people do not experience reality in the same way (Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014).

The study explored the participants' experience of how clothing reinforces their personalities. For example, individuals may choose to incorporate modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols into their personal brands based on their upbringing and culture, which creates a deeper meaning and a sense of connection for them.

#### **1.4.1.2 Epistemological position of Interpretivism**

Epistemology can be defined as the study of knowledge including the different ways of knowing (Horrigan, 2007). The epistemological view of Interpretivism entails that in order to form an understanding of human behaviour, it is necessary to understand what people regard as common sense as this is an essential source of information for understanding people (Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). Interpretivists believe that facts are dependent on context and people's interpretation of information. It is therefore

essential that researchers interact with what is being researched, as well as with their own beliefs and previous life experiences, which will influence their findings (Hussey, 2009). This approach was applied in this study.

The interpretivist epistemological position contributed to an insight into the participants' subjective motivations for using modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs to build their personal brands.

#### **1.4.1.3 Axiological position of Interpretivism**

Axiology deals with the study of values and value judgements giving insight into what is valued within a particular paradigm and it also questions whether values shape that which is understood. Interpretivists are of the belief that researchers follow specific values which assist them to decide what is factual and enable them to interpret these facts (Hussey, 2009; Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014).

An axiological study focuses on an individual's values and the role these values play in the individual's formulation of understanding phenomena (Ponterotto, 2005:131). Interpretivists explore and focus on the complex understanding of unique realities and the emphasis is to distinctively discuss those values that shape the research, including both the interpretations of participants and their own (Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). The axiological approach contributed to the analysis and insight into the participants' choices regarding personal branding, taking into account their past experiences, therefore enabling a wholesome understanding of the situation.

#### **1.4.2 Basic Research**

Basic research aims to attain an in-depth understanding of a particular topic which is necessary in order to build on existing research regarding a topic by providing a basis from where new research can be initiated (Kumar, 2011: 10).

This study represents basic research, as the concept of fashion choices for the purpose of personal branding is a relatively new area of exploration that has not yet been researched intensively. The data gathered from this study may, therefore, add to the existing body of literature and provide additional insight into the formation of personal branding, however, the results cannot be generalised.

### **1.4.3 Exploratory Research**

Exploratory research aims to collect data on a topic that has previously not been fully researched and therefore usually explores unknown areas. As social systems continuously evolve, it results in the continuous rise in new areas of research (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). There is limited knowledge on the concept of modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs, and especially the link with personal branding. The aim of this exploratory research study was to provide more insight regarding this and to build on existing literature regarding this topic. The different ways in which modern fashion designs incorporate aspects of the phenomena were explored, as well as the reasons why individuals may choose to associate themselves with these symbols and designs in their personal branding.

## **1.5 RESEARCH APPROACH**

### **1.5.1 Qualitative Research**

A qualitative research design was utilised for the study because of the exploratory nature of the study. The flexibility and more casual approach offered by a qualitative design was well-suited to the study. According to Golafashani (2003), qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that investigates phenomena in context-specific settings. Hoepfl (1997: 63) states that “where quantitative researchers seek causal determination, prediction and generalisation of findings, qualitative researchers seek understanding and insight into phenomena about which little is known”. Qualitative research methods were suitable for this study because it facilitated attaining rich comprehensive data that increased insight. It would not have been possible to gain this kind of information from a quantitative research study. The information gained from the in-depth interviews was thus used to broaden understanding, expand knowledge, clarify issues, identify behaviours, seek motivations and provide input for future research and development where variables that were identified might be tested quantitatively (Du Plooy, 2008:83).

### **1.5.2 Cross-sectional research design**

A cross sectional research design creates a general picture of a phenomenon at one point in time (Maree, 2007; Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013). This design was utilised in the present study where participants were questioned about their decision to purposefully incorporate modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs into their personal brands to gain an understanding of their perception of their motivations regarding certain choices relating to their personal brands at that time. The focus of the study was not on how the social phenomena of personal branding or fashion designs that incorporate modernised Afrocentric symbols have evolved over time, but on how they are perceived by the participants at one point in time, thus a cross-sectional design was utilised.

## **1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **1.6.1 Research Question**

The research question and sub-question were formulated as follows:

#### **1.6.1.1 Research question**

What are the motivations of a selection of 20-30 year old urban South Africans who represent active/overt personal brands, for purposefully choosing modernised Afrocentric fashion designs to establish and reinforce their personal brands?

#### **1.6.1.2 Research sub-question:**

Apart from using personal brands for professional/commercial purposes, does the use of modernised Afrocentric fashion designs for personal brands also fulfil personal or social needs?

### **1.6.2 Research Objective**

The research objective was firstly to explore why Afrocentric fashion influencers purposefully choose to use modernised Afrocentric fashion designs to enhance their personal brands, and secondly, to explore whether the use of these designs in personal brands, apart from being used for professional/commercial purposes, also fulfil personal or social needs.

### **1.6.3 Unit of analysis**

According to Babbie (2010: 121), a unit of analysis can include individuals, cases and social artefacts whose elements can be observed, described or explained by researchers. In this study, individuals formed the unit of analysis and information was gathered through in-depth interviews with a selection of young, urban South Africans who purposefully choose to use modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs to build their personal brands.

### **1.6.4 Population and Sampling**

The population of a study consists of the total group of people from whom information is required in order to answer the research question/s (Babbie, 2010). For this study, the population comprised of all South African individuals who represent active/overt personal brands and who incorporate modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs into their daily clothing choices to build their personal brands. The criteria that were used to determine the population and sample are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Since it was impractical to use the entire population, the sample that was used comprised eight 20-30 year old urban South Africans who met the selection criteria and were accessible to the researcher. For example, the eight participants that were selected to participate in the study all had active social media pages with a substantial number of followers with whom they regularly engaged with. They regularly posted content, of which most was directly linked to modernised Afrocentric fashion design. A more detailed discussion of the selection criteria is provided Chapter 4.

A non-probability, snowball sampling method was employed. One young urban South African who uses modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs to build his/her own brand was identified and contacted. This person was then asked for a reference to another potential participant, similar to him/herself who would be willing to participate in the research, and so forth. Participation was on a voluntary basis. This sampling method saved time as it would have been very difficult to identify potential participants through any other means. It also enhanced the accuracy of results because it ensured that all the data collected for the research was relevant to examine the motivations for using modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs for personal brand building. Full details of the sample are discussed in Chapter 4.

#### **1.6.5 Data Collection Method**

The data collection method used in this study was aimed at gathering useful information in order to answer the research questions (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

##### **1.6.5.1 Semi-structured In-depth Interviews:**

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to collect the data needed for this study. The interviews were scheduled to suit all parties and were conducted by the interviewer personally. Direct interaction between the interviewer and participants allowed, *inter alia*, for the interpretation of nonverbal reactions which provided an additional source of information (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). It proved valuable to explore the participants' own perceptions regarding their clothing choices as opposed to construing or interpreting their choices through observations of their clothing styles.

An interview structure was used which contained open-ended questions, inspired by the theoretical foundation and the literature review of related topics that were considered useful for structuring the interviews. Interview questions covered a number of key themes and included questions such as why the participants choose to interact with modernised Afrocentric symbols, the significance of these symbols for the participant, whether they are aware of the symbolic values attached to the Afrocentric symbols used in modernised fashion designs and why they purposefully use these symbols and designs to build their personal brands. Reflective notes (memoing) were also made during the interviews, in which sudden insights that occurred were recorded.

The interviews lasted for an average of an hour and were digitally recorded (with permission from the participants) for ease of transcription. In-depth interviews allowed for the gaining of insight into the participant's opinions and views on the specific topic. They provided an opportunity for the participants to express themselves verbally to explain the significance and reasoning behind the clothing choices they make to represent their personal brands.

#### **1.6.6 Data Analysis and Interpretation Methods**

During this phase of the study, a qualitative thematic analysis was conducted that entailed a systematic analysis of the research data in order to gain a sufficient understanding of the social phenomenon that was the object of this study (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). This method was utilised as a means to identify, analyse and report on emergent patterns that were used to address the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Data interpretation took place in an interactive process together with data analysis

(Saldana, 2009; Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014).

Data presentation entailed the organisation of information in order to allow the drawing of conclusions (Welman, 2005; Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014). Quotes from the verbatim transcriptions of the interviews were used to clearly describe the process.

## **1.7 FEASIBILITY AND ETHICAL ASPECTS OF THE STUDY**

Feasibility relates to measures that are taken to ensure that the study is achievable regarding time, resources and appropriate methodology to achieve the research objectives (Koonin, 2014). The study was feasible since it could be concluded during the allowed time. No funding or special resources were required for the study and the methodology used was appropriate for the topic of the study.

According to Mauther, Birch, Jessop and Miller (2002: 172), an ethical study is one that takes into account “principles of conduct that are acceptable”. Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Independent Institute of Education’s Postgraduate Review Committee before the study was commenced. Following this approval, an introductory letter was sent to all the participants which clearly stated the background and intention of the study, as well as the ethical measures that would be applied. The participants were also requested to sign a letter of consent to confirm their willingness to participate in the interviews. Confidentiality of the participants was assured by protecting their identities. No names were linked to data, interpretations or findings in the study. The participants were given the option to opt-out at any point should they feel uncomfortable, and complete transparency and honesty throughout the study were guaranteed. It was clearly indicated that no monetary or any other form of compensation would be offered to the participants. The participants were offered access to their

transcripts after the interviews, as well as access to the entire study upon completion. The transcriptions of the interviews were stored on a password-protected computer and a hard copy is stored in a locked cabinet in a secure storeroom at the Vega campus for a period of five years. After this time, the hard copy transcriptions will be destroyed, and the electronic copies will be deleted. In addition, all data sources in the study were properly referenced in order to avoid misleading findings and information.

Regarding axiology, any values that the participants or researcher may hold that could influence or shape the research design or the interpretation of results were identified and taken into consideration (refer to section 4.4.1.2).

## **1.8 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

Chapter 1 presented an outline of the study in order to orientate the reader with regard to the type of study, the context of the study, the relevance of the study, the research problems, the research methodology, and the feasibility and ethical aspects of the study.

The purpose of the study was clearly explained, as well as the fact that the research is exploratory in nature and took an interpretivist approach. Details were provided of the qualitative study that was followed and the manner in which the data was collected. It was explained that the data would be analysed and interpreted via the use of a qualitative thematic analysis. It was also indicated how honesty and integrity would be maintained throughout the study.

## **1.9 EXPOSITION OF THE THESIS**

This thesis was organised into six chapters.

As mentioned above, Chapter 1 presented an outline of the study for orientation purposes and explained the type, context and relevance of the study, the research problem, the research methodology, and the feasibility and ethical aspects of the study. The concepts that were used in the study were defined and explained. All these aspects are discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

Chapter 2 comprises the theoretical foundation. In this chapter, the theoretical approach on which the study was based, as well as several other theories are discussed, which facilitated the structuring of the study, formulation of research questions and analysis and interpretation of the results of the study.

Chapter 3 comprises a critical analysis of the existing literature that is relevant to this study.

In Chapter 4, the research design and methodology are discussed. This includes, but is not limited to, the unit of analysis, population and sampling, data collection, analysis, and interpretation methods. The rationale for the selection of this methodology is explained and the benefits and drawbacks of the selected methodology made clear. The connection between the value of selected methods and the purpose of the study is explained and the chapter concludes by expanding on ethical issues and implications involved in completing the study.

Chapter 5 focuses on explaining the steps that were followed in the collection of the data and the analysis and interpretation thereof with the aim of answering the research questions.

Chapter 6, the final chapter, provides an account of the findings and conclusions attained in the study, as well as the contributions and limitations of the study, after which recommendations for future studies are provided.

# **CHAPTER TWO**

## **THEORETICAL FOUNDATION**

## **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 1 provided a broad overview of the study which incorporated two main concepts, namely Afrocentric fashion symbols and personal branding. In this chapter, the main theoretical foundation of the study, Symbolic Interactionism, is discussed first, including perspectives relating to identity management, person perception, signs and symbols and symbolic connotations. This is followed by a discussion of nonverbal communication, including aspects relating to clothing and appearance as well as cultural connotations. In the last section of the chapter fashion diffusion and adoption is discussed, including the Trickle Theories, social media engagement, word-of-mouth and electronic-word-of-mouth. These perspectives were useful to form a theoretical framework for the study, which provided a foundation for and background to the study by providing a combination of thoughts and works from various authors and theorists relating to the field of the study. The theoretical framework also assisted in structuring the study, formulating research questions, as well as analysing and interpreting the results of the study. The literature review, which explores the most recent information and research available on the study topic, is discussed in Chapter 3.

## **2.2 SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM**

Symbolic Interactionism was identified as the most suitable theoretical approach to the study. Symbolic Interactionism is concerned with the concepts of *symbols* and *interaction*, where, for the purpose of this study, *symbols* stand for social objects including fashion designs that convey meaning. The concept of *interaction* denotes interpersonal communication interaction during which meanings of symbols are interpreted. Through interaction, human beings share meanings that are constantly open to change and interpretation, which then creates language (including nonverbal aspects of fashion). The language then becomes a shared symbol between people and

formulates a way that individuals make sense of their world. People then use language to express the various meanings of objects and this influences the way people interact with objects (Plummer, 2000; Tan, 2003).

As stated above, meaning is created when human beings interact (Tan, 2003). Meaning is socially constructed and is a powerful force in shaping people's behaviour. Already in 1969, Blumer asserted that human beings react to objects dependent on the meaning those objects hold for them. The objects can take the form of physical objects, situations or human beings that individuals may encounter in their daily lives. Kaiser (1997) points out that people act towards others based on their appearance and what that may communicate to them. When it comes to fashion, different garments or fashions may be interpreted differently, depending on a person's culture and background (Sproles & Burns, 1994). An individual from an African background would interpret the use of Afrocentric fashion symbols differently from an individual from a European background.

Cultural objects and fashion can be classified as human inventions, which comprise sets of symbols that human beings have created, and which culture continues to create and revise over time. For example, new cultural objects and fashions are created continuously, enabling people to communicate certain meanings (Plummer, 2000). With regard to Afrocentric fashion, individuals may not have the ability to change the meaning behind the actual cultural symbol, however, they can be innovative and creative in the ways that they choose to use the symbol.

The concept of Symbolic Interactionism was founded by Mead (1934), but Blumer (1969), a student of Mead, coined the term *Symbolic Interactionism*. Mead asserted that Symbolic Interactionism is concerned with the ways in which people interpret their surroundings and assign meaning to objects, people and self. Blumer (1969) focused on the interpretive process that individuals go through to understand social experiences

(Stryker, 2008). According to Blumer (1969), meaning is formed through human interaction. The meanings that people assign to objects shape the way they conduct themselves, and people's actions during interaction then defines the meaning they may construct for an object. Mead (1934) asserted that there are two forms of social interaction amongst humans: the conversation of gestures (non-symbolic interaction) and the use of significant symbols (symbolic interactionism). Mead (1934) further emphasised that in order for symbolic interactionism to occur, there has to be some form of interpretation that takes place, if an individual simply reacts without interpreting an event or action, it is deemed to be a non-symbolic interaction. However, human beings usually interact symbolically, creating objects and language and finding meaning in each other's actions. According to Mead (1934), Symbolic Interactionism focuses on three main areas, namely *society*, *self* and *mind*.

### **2.2.1 Mead's concept of Society**

In order to understand the actions or behaviour of an individual, it is necessary to understand the social group to which the individual belongs, as these social groups play a role in shaping the individual's behaviour, both alone and within the social group (Coser, 1977). Mead argued that society enables the construction of self through communication with and interaction of individuals. People can assume the role of "the other" within social interactions, where they can step outside their own beings and look at themselves as others do and this, in turn, shapes the way in which they interact. Thus, fashion obtains meaning within the context of society (Solomon, 1983). When an individual is clad in Afrocentric fashion designs/symbols, these symbols and cues will be interpreted differently by people of different societies.

Blumer (1969) also stated that the meanings that human beings assign to objects are the result of social interaction. He argued that depending on specific situations and

interpretive processes, human beings can alter meanings. Individuals may not only be influenced by others with whom they interact but may also construct meaning through conversations they have with themselves (Williams, 2008). Thus, individuals may choose to incorporate Afrocentric fashion symbols into their personal brands due to a shift in the perception of the phenomenon for the better. They may choose to incorporate these garments into their daily wear as they personally want to communicate their pride in their heritage and cultural background – a possibility that is explored in terms of sub-question 1.1 of this study, relating to personal and social functions of personal brands.

Kaiser's (1997) view correlates with that of Blumer in that meaning is seen to be socially constructed and is a result of interaction between people as they need to learn and discover meanings. For example, a piece of African fabric may hold more meaning after members of the society from which the fabric originates interacted and communicated the meaning behind the patterns on that particular piece of cloth. Clothing holds more meaning after the symbolism behind the garments is understood (Kaiser, 1997).

Mead's concept of *society* correlates strongly with the **Social Identity Theory** (Tajfel, 1978) that defines social identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept that derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978: 63).

Cupach and Imahori (2005) are concerned with the multiple identities that an individual possesses on a cultural or relational level. Since individuals can belong to numerous social groups, they may have more than one social identity, although one social identity will always be more dominant than the rest (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). Abrams and Hogg (1990) argue that individuals need to identify with a particular group to gain an understanding of social settings in order to create a foundation for their behaviour and

emotions. Clothes may not only be used to define and communicate social identity, but also as a symbol of connection to other social groups (Feinberg, Mataro & Burroughs, 1992). The way people dress is a form of representation of their core self, a reflection of their personal identity and a need to connect with like-minded people (explored in sub-question 1.1). Abrams and Hogg (1990) state that people join groups to both boost their self-esteem and eradicate feelings of uncertainty since they can relate to and belong to a group of people who have similar behaviours and attitudes. Individuals structure their lives according to the rules and systems put in place by the group to which they belong, and this provides a foundation and guide to how they live their lives.

According to Cupach and Imahori (2005), there is a need for flexibility within identity management to facilitate communication with others from a cultural identity that is different from one's own. Aspects of one's identities are exposed through the presentation of "face" (which symbolises the situated identities which people claim) and one's capability to maintain "face" throughout interaction, which reflects the person's interpersonal communication capability in both intracultural and intercultural contexts.

### **2.2.2 Mead's concept of *Self***

Mead's concept of the *self* has been an ongoing topic of research and numerous definitions exist. Rosenberg (1979) describes the self as the totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings and considers the individual to be an object of thought. Leary and Tangney (2003) associate the self with one's behaviour and as a unifying construct of personal traits, such as self-presentation, self-consciousness and self-esteem. According to Tesser (2002), the self is a collection of abilities, values and preferences that distinguish one individual from another. In the present study, the self was considered in relation to behaviour and the research was based on the definition put forward by Leary and Tangney (2003), in other words, the study focused on an

individual's clothing choices and preferences based on how they want to be perceived by the general public or identify with the values of a particular group.

In terms of the *self*, Mead studied the behaviour of people within the social process and argued that we experience a sense of self after we view ourselves from the perspective of how society views us. Cooley (1967) introduced the concept of the *looking glass self* where he described the development of the self within the context of a social environment. Individuals perceive others as a mirror and the way that we believe other people view us determines how we feel about ourselves. Goffman (1959) introduced the concept of dramaturgy where he states that the self emerges as a result of performance during social interaction and people shape their idea of self through the process of presentation. People rely heavily on the way that others perceive them to be and endeavor to present a version of self that is accepted and supported by others. People are more receptive to individuals who fulfil the expectation of their idea of self. With regard to this study, individuals who have chosen to construct their 'selves' through the use of Afrocentric fashion symbols may have done so based on the fact that the latter has gained popularity and positive connotations within society and is no longer seen as negative in the eyes of others.

Cupach and Imahori (1993) based their **Identity Management Theory** on Goffman's book *Interaction ritual: Essays of face-to-face behaviour* (1976), where he introduces the concept of the self-image and explains that the self-image that is portrayed during interactions is not permanent, but plays a large role within social influence. When an individual alters his/her self-image in a social context, this in turn changes how the person feels about him/herself since individuals showcase aspects of themselves in order to be appealing to whomever they interact with. Individuals who choose to incorporate Afrocentric fashion symbols into their personal brands are very clearly portraying their self-image to all those they may encounter on a daily basis.

Mead's conceptualisation of *self* also correlates with the Person Perception Theory, where Fiske and Taylor (1984) argue that cues that are perceived by observers are interpreted and judged based on their personal mindsets and belief systems. Each perceiver will, therefore, form a different opinion to the next person who may also encounter the person being perceived. Tajfel (1974) takes on a different approach regarding the Social Identity Theory where he states that messages are unpacked by observers based on their membership in a certain social group, which then emulates their thought processes and how they think about themselves. It is, however, possible to become desensitised to certain cues that are transmitted by clothing as one may have encountered these cues numerous times and therefore overlook what significance wearing them may have to the wearer (Kaiser, 1997).

As stated by Barnard (2002), fashion can be used as a communicative tool due to its ability to not only reflect one's personal views but also tie them to a social or cultural group. Through different clothing articles and symbols, individuals can control perceptions that are formed about them, which then enables them to differentiate themselves in society (Chittenden, 2009). People form judgments about others based on their choice of clothing - what people wear is often taken as an indication of their social status and a reflection of the role they play in society (Barnard, 2002). An appropriate example may be a person who chooses to occasionally wear an Afrocentric accessory, such as a handbag, will be perceived differently from one who is consistently dressed entirely in African garb. The latter may appear to play a larger or more proficient role within the Afrocentric community solely based on his/her dedication and choice of clothing.

People's choice of clothing enables them to communicate a wide array of messages and meaning to perceivers (Dorrace, 2016). Observers in turn internalise and interpret these messages to form perceptions of the wearer - this process is related to the

Person Perception Theory. Person perception entails the use of external variables, such as what one is wearing, to form ideas about the wearer as opposed to relying on other cues that may be formed when physically communicating with the wearer (Clark, 1997; Smith & Collins, 2009). For instance, when a perceiver views an individual wearing a head wrap which is directly linked with Afrocentric fashion, it creates an immediate association with the African continent and culture without the perceiver having to directly ask the person about his or her values and beliefs. Therefore, clothing provides an efficient cue for classifying others (Hamid, 1969). Individuals can be judged according to how they choose to portray their individualism in accordance with the clothes they choose to wear. Clothing choice can, therefore, be a representation of an individual's personal brand.

Individuals select their clothing as a way to boost their self-esteem and portray their identity (Banister & Hogg, 2004). The clothes people wear can serve as a symbol of their social status and often, perceptions of an individual's well-being are made from their clothing choice and appearance (Michelman, 2001). Furthermore, individuals selectively choose their clothing in order to present an appearance that is acceptable to their peers (Rudrow, 2014). The global acceptance of Afrocentric fashion symbols in modern fashion design has therefore encouraged the popularity of this phenomenon as individuals are no longer afraid to be alienated or to have negative connotations attached to them because they are wearing this form of dress (Jennings, 2017).

The Person Perception and Social Identity theories, therefore, contribute to a deeper understanding of how the clothes people choose to wear are perceived by those who are encountered and how the latter may unpack the messages that are communicated regarding social standing. Figure 5 below illustrates this.



Figure 5: Afropunk, 2017.

*Friends attending the Afropunk festival in Johannesburg which aims at celebrating Afrocentricity and acts as a social setting for like-minded people. (afropunk.com, 2017)*

### 2.2.3 Mead's concept of *Mind*

With regard to *mind*, Mead stated that there is a distinction between the “I” and the “me” in a social context. The “I” is concerned with the way one responds to others and the “me” is in relation to the ideologies of others which one assumes. Meaning is created within one’s self; from the person that you think you are, as well as the person you believe others think you are, and these constructions of reality determine how you compare yourself to others in society. Simply stated, the “me” is the person whom the individual thinks he is and the “I” is the way the person perceives him/herself through the eyes of others. According to Littlejohn (1996), the “I” comprises the impulsive and unpredictable behaviours of an individual, while the “me” is concerned with the consistent patterns shared with others. Individuals react based on an impulse from the “I” which then becomes quickly controlled by the “me” - while the “I” dictates a person’s reaction, the “me” determines direction and guidance. For example, when an individual chooses to incorporate a specific Afrocentric fashion symbol into his/her personal brand (a decision by the “I”), the person is aware of what that clothing item will contribute to the symbolic construction of his/her self in the eyes of observers and in the end the “me” determines whether the person will continue wearing the symbol. In other words, the person puts him/herself in the shoes of others to determine what the others think of this new way in which the individual has constructed him/herself.

#### **2.2.4 Symbolic connotations**

Solomon (1983) indicates that symbolic consumption emerges from the concept of symbolic interaction and is concerned with how consumers decide to purchase products based on the symbolic meaning the products hold for the individual. People may thus purchase Afrocentric fashion items based on the symbolic connotations the items may hold for the individual and the way that it portrays the individual’s personality (Sproles & Burns, 1994).

Chandler (2002) defines connotative meaning as meaning that is implied by a sign apart from the thing which it describes explicitly. Signs carry cultural and emotional associations or meanings in addition to their literal or denotative meanings. A sign is a bifacial entity consisting of the *signified* and the *signifier*. The signified is the represented concept, while the signifier is the material medium of representation (Gottdiener & Lagopoulos, 1986). Applied to Afrocentric fashion symbols, the signified is the pattern that is present on the fabric, for example, a sequence of triangles, and the signifier, the kind of fabric that the pattern appears on. The signified and signifier in clothing are subject to sudden changes, due to the choices of the few who decide to incorporate these signs into their daily fashion and in a fleeting time span, when these signs hold relevance. Signs in fashion are unstable, they may be strong for a period of time and weak moments later (Ligas and Crepaldi, 2018).

According to Barthes (2012), a myth is the signifier in connotative reference. When we adopt a certain connotative meaning, we are more likely to accept it as a part of our culture. However, cultural connotations differ from myths. For instance, different studies, such as Slack and Hristova (2016), indicate that “color terms” vary from one culture to another. According to Munsell’s colour system (Centore, 2011:1), “color may refer to the human perception of that color which is affected by visual context or an underlying physical property, such as a specific wavelength of visible light and finally deduced to cultural, religious, scientific or social contexts”. The meaning of fashion signs and symbols includes both denotative and connotative meanings. Cultural connotation may be referred to as myth, which means that the emotional or ideological associations of a word differ from one culture to another. There are many examples regarding the cultural connotation of colours and signs which indicate, for example, differences in the perception of clothes with regard to beauty or elegance (Leak, 1994).

#### **2.2.4.1 Signs and symbols**

Signs and symbols are as dated as humankind and even precede the written word. Miller (2015: 1) states that “signs and symbols primarily originated in established religions, for example, the cross, the Star of David and the laughing Buddha. Signs and symbols help people to demonstrate their beliefs, to locate like-minded people, and to identify specific people and things”. Redding (in Kihlström, 2018: 22) writes “(W)e perceive, understand, and negotiate the world around us by investing meaning in all manner of signs and symbols”.

Miller (2015) further asserts that various symbols - whether belonging to a brand, religion or otherwise - get saturated with meaning when people interact with them. For example, some Rastafarians wear long, dress-like African-style outfits to symbolise the African roots of their tradition. For the same reason, they also use medallions of Ras Tafari (the lion), which is the imperial symbol of the Ethiopian throne (Schiffman, 2017). Miller (2015: 1) explains it as follows: “When we see an individual dressed in a white jacket and a stethoscope, we assume the person is a doctor. The white jacket and stethoscope are the symbols of the profession, and when combined, we naturally assume the person wearing them must be some kind of doctor. It is often said that the epitome of branding is making your brand ‘tattoo worthy’. This is when you connect with the community at such a deep, intrinsic level that they are willing to ink your brand on their skin”.

Africa is a very branded society. People are more likely to notice a branded piece of cloth than a blank one (Miller, 2015). Signs and symbols provide communicative cues that can be understood by people with a common heritage around a given symbol (Farber, 2010). Signs and symbols have a deep impact on human psychology and spiritual life, relaying the intuitive wisdom of the ancestors (Baker, 2014). In Africa, symbols and signs tell stories and provide information, reminders and lessons. These

signs and symbols are considered sacred and are primarily used in ceremonial and religious contexts (Farber, 2010).

Klein (cited in Miller, 2011:344), says: “Fashion symbols have grown so dominant that they have essentially transformed the clothing on which they appear into empty carriers for the brands they represent”. The signs or symbols we exhibit on our clothing represent our values, beliefs and connections. They showcase which tribe, religion, age, caste, motivation or creed the wearer belongs to and depending on the location, these symbols get highly coveted. Individuals choose to engage with these symbols as they enable the individual to increase awareness, engage the community and gain acceptability (Miller, 2011).

According to Miller (2011: 347) adaptability of a fashion symbol may depend on three factors:

- **Simplicity:** Simple symbols do better than complex ones as interpretability and ease of identification is quicker. The simplicity of the sign allows it to be widely recognisable. For example, McDonald’s highly recognisable ‘M’ is widely recognised as it is so easy to remember.
- **Connectivity:** A symbol is more than a graphic image - it is packed with meaning. Images are always packed with meaning and must resonate with community creed, motivation, etc. The four interlinked rings in the Audi logo, for example, signify the union of four founding companies to create the brand - a meaning that would resonate with Audi’s loyal consumers.
- **Attractiveness:** It may seem apparent, but it cannot be emphasised enough that iconic symbols tend to have a strong aesthetic value and they are usually appealing

to look at. They are well-balanced, well-designed and something people are proud to wear.

Good symbols will work almost everywhere and will get a popular reception (Nelson, 1998). When it comes to fashion and garment style, consumers may not be drawn to brands that carry only a strong value proposition, there needs to be more to the brand as consumers do not truly believe there is a huge difference between designs as it is only a clear sign or symbol that connects with them on a deeper level. A sign has the ability to visually convey value propositions and beliefs in a brief, concise way (Miller, 2015).

A fashion item's visual identity will comprise of a number of visual cues, such as shapes, symbols, numbers and words. People are inclined to remember symbols and it has been noted that a symbol increases brand recognition by up to 60% (Pelsmacker, Geuens & Bergh, 2013). A sign or symbol has the power to transmit and communicate meanings and messages nonverbally. In personal branding, the power of symbols is both emotional and practical. On an emotional level, it can affect how people feel when they look at an item of clothing, while on a practical level it can help an individual stand out in the crowd. 90% of snap judgments made about fashion items are based on signs or symbols alone. The sign influences how people perceive the 'personality' of the brand in question, and the relationship between fashion and sign hinges on the perceived appropriateness of the sign being the right 'fit' for the particular fashion (Singh, 2006).

Gross (2017: 7) states that "whether you are a designer or not, it is helpful to know sign meanings and symbolism so you can make informed decisions. If you choose a symbol meaning 'tranquility' for your extreme sports fashion, you might be sending the wrong message". Therefore, fashion designers/influencers must choose symbols that suit their

fashion brands. Thus, the study focused on examining how Afrocentric signs and symbols are used in personal branding. The imagery present on clothes and traditional African attire holds various and different meanings (Barthes, 2012). Figure 6 below provides the meanings of some African fashion print symbols.

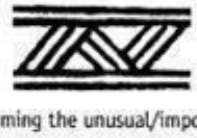
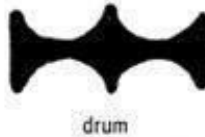
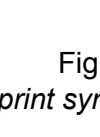
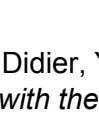
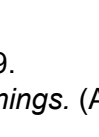
|                                                                                     |                                                                                     |                                                                                     |                                                                                     |                                                                                      |                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    |    |    |    |    |    |
| think ahead                                                                         | welcome                                                                             | good living                                                                         | learn from your mistakes                                                            | two heads are better than one                                                        | truth                                                                                 |
|    |    |    |    |    |    |
| hand come, hand go                                                                  | congratulations                                                                     | wisdom/knowledge                                                                    | good-bye                                                                            | have courage                                                                         | I salute you                                                                          |
|   |   |   |   |   |   |
| strength                                                                            | faithfulness                                                                        | enjoy yourself                                                                      | royalty                                                                             | good fortune                                                                         | performing the unusual/impossible                                                     |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| give me your heart                                                                  | forgiveness                                                                         | faith                                                                               | I shall meet you again                                                              | hope                                                                                 | love eye                                                                              |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| two good friends                                                                    | you have changed                                                                    | house of peace                                                                      | the king sees all                                                                   | understanding                                                                        | drum                                                                                  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|                                                                                     |                                                                                     |                                                                                     |                                                                                     |                                                                                      | peace                                                                                 |

Figure 6: Didier, Y. 2019.  
Common African fashion print symbols with their meanings. (Afroleghends.com, 2019).

The following section will focus on nonverbal aspects that communicate messages during interactions between people.

## 2.3 NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION THEORY

Hall (1959: 5) defines nonverbal communication as the process of transmitting messages and information to a third party in the form of a “silent language” through mediums such as gestures, body language and clothing. Nonverbal communication constitutes numerous behaviours and meanings, therefore making it a complex topic to discuss and understand (Butland, 2012). It includes (but is not limited to) tone of voice, distance people keep between themselves, and dress (Butland, 2012). According to Gamble and Gamble (2013), the complexity of nonverbal communication may result in people sending out signals without being consciously aware of what messages they are transmitting. These messages can be in the form of facial expressions, body language and clothing, amongst others.

### 2.3.1 Clothing and appearance

Clothing generally serves two functions, namely material and cultural. Material functions include protection and modesty and the cultural function of clothing is to act as a communicator (Barnard, 2002). For the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on the use of clothing for its cultural function as explained by Barnard (2002) in his book, *Fashion as a Communicator*.

The following messages that can be shared by individuals through their clothing is distinguished by Barnard (2002: 338):

- Fashion and clothing can be used as a form of **individualistic** expression. Clothing items are used to establish people’s individualism by distinguishing

them from others. How individuals put together an outfit by selecting and matching different fashion items may serve as an expression of their uniqueness.

- Fashion and clothing can also be used as an indication of **social worth and status** as clothing cues are used by publics to form perceptions of the wearer. Some types of clothing are also known to bear specific meaning and are used to establish one's status or social worth. For example, in the Xhosa culture, a boy who has been welcomed into manhood has to wear headgear in the form of a hat for a period of time - this serves to communicate to the public that the individual has transitioned into manhood (Gold, 2017).
- A person's **economic worth and status** can be portrayed through clothes. Within an occupational space, those who tend to be higher up in the hierarchy will typically wear more expensive and refined clothing as they have more access to them. The CEO of a company is more likely to wear exclusive and expensive brands as compared to the intern in the same company, which is a clear reflection that the CEO has more disposable income and can, therefore, afford to spend money on more expensive clothing. This is illustrated in Figure 7 below – note the symbols on the garment.



Figure 7: Ikande, M. 2018.

*A Nigerian “aso oke” robe fashion that communicates wealth. (legit.ng, 2018)*

- Fashion and clothing define **social rituals**. An individual's choice of clothing can reflect an ongoing ritual, for instance at a wedding, guests would usually not wear ordinary clothes, but would put in significantly more effort to wear new or fancy

attire. People's choice of dress, in this case, is determined by the rules of the ritual.

An aspect that was important for this study was that clothes may carry definite cultural connotations for observers.

### **2.3.2 Cultural connotations**

According to McAdams (2017), one of the unique features of traditional African clothing is the use of festive colours, intricate patterns and figurative symbols to transmit meaning. According to McAdams (2017), the African attire is representative of something more than mere adornment and the garments are not limited to praising political heroes, commemorating historical events or asserting social identities, but is also used as a form of rhetoric - a channel for the silent projection of argument.

In some African countries, for example, chiefdom is signified through the presence of emblems such as lions, elephants or other powerful animals or reptiles on the clothes worn by the chiefs. A traditional healer, on the other hand, would wear garments portraying images of snakes, hyenas and other supernatural objects which are used as a means to signify their powers and trade. The garments of traditional healers often came in red and black colours, while the chiefs adorned gold and blue colours to signify royalty (Hollows, 2010).

African attire is not only used as a political symbol but also as an indication of one's social role (Barnard, 2002). In some southern African tribes, a nursing mother is known to wear nursing charms which sufficed as a form of protection for her (Hollows, 2010). The traditional dress for the women of the Akan tribe in the Ivory Coast includes various

pieces which convey their age and marital status. According to McAdams (2017: 1) “woman wearing a Kaba, or top, and a long wrap-around skirt called an Asee Ntoma, is perceived to be young and unmarried while adding an Abosoo, a stretch of cloth around her midsection which is often used to carry a small child, she is now perceived to be a married mother”. Regarding economic worth and status, the Ndebele and BaTonga tribes of South Africa and Zimbabwe respectively, use beads and charms as a sign of wealth and beauty. Similar to their art murals, the beadwork became an iconic sign for the Ndebele and BaTonga tribes and the designs served social functions as markers of cultural identity and status based on the variety in colours and intricate designs (Hollows, 2010).



Figure 8: Bona Magazine. 2013.  
*A Ndebele woman wearing traditional Ndebele attire and beadwork. (Bona.co.za, 2013).*

Individuals who choose to incorporate Afrocentric fashion symbols into their personal brands may choose to incorporate various patterns, beadwork, garments and colours into their daily attire in order to convey various messages, be it their social and economic status, social role or political beliefs, amongst others.

Clothing is considered to be an important form of nonverbal communication as it provides perceivers with visual cues and information about the wearer without direct physical contact (Howlett et al, 2013). Clothing forms part of an individual's appearance and enables observers to obtain details, such as the personality and socio-economic status of the wearer, thus allowing perceptions about them to be formed (Nielsen & Kernaleguen, 1976). Feinberg, Mataro and Burroughs (1992) state that because clothing is used daily, it is viewed frequently by publics and clothing choice as a symbol is easily manipulated. It plays a vital role in the formation of perceptions. An individual's choice of clothes, whether worn consciously with the intention to communicate something or not, provides a lot of information about the wearer to observers (Howlett et al., 2013). An appropriate example could be if individuals choose to incorporate Afrocentric fashion symbols into their daily attire, they may project their appreciation of the garb and possible connection to the African culture to those whom they may encounter on a daily basis.

From the foregoing arguments, it is evident that the clothes we choose to wear say something about us. The question, however, arises about the meaning and communication behind the clothing. Clothing is categorised as neither written nor spoken communication (even when our clothes have slogans and labels on them) (Howlett et al., 2013). We are, however, prone to misunderstanding cues behind someone's clothes or may wonder about the meaning behind these particular clothing items. Clothing is not a neutral or innocent form of communication. As discussed above, it involves amongst others, power and ideology. When clothes are difficult to

differentiate, a symbol can be the distinguishing element of brand identity. The symbol can by itself create awareness, associations, a liking or feelings which in turn can affect loyalty and perceived quality (Aaker, 1991: 802). The symbol is not an artistic expression of the fashion, but rather an emotive communicative instrument/device that has been used since the dawn of mankind. Symbols are one of the most effective devices for enabling a person or organisation to stand out in a crowded, competitive, information rich community (Aaker, 1991; Howlett et al., 2013).

In this study, the focus was on investigating whether Afrocentric fashion symbols are used as a form of personal brand communication and to explore the relationship between personal brand and the achievement of personal and social goals.

Having considered the argument that the primary, or material, functions of clothing are protection from the elements and modesty, various authors (Feinberg, Mataro & Burroughs, 1992; Gibson, 2011; Hollows, 2010) looked at the cultural or communicative functions of clothing. It is socially agreed, and coded, that different garments, colours, and textures generate certain meanings. An individual wearing an Afrocentric fashion symbol, therefore, conveys a message to those he/she encounters, whether intentionally or unintentionally. The meaning generated by the observer regarding the attire is entirely based on the level of knowledge possessed by the latter about Afrocentric fashion symbols (Gibson, 2011).



Figure 9: Loveweddingsng. 2015.  
*A Nigerian special attire designated only for weddings. (Loveweddings.ng, 2015).*

In the next section more specific theories regarding fashion that are applicable to the study will be discussed.

## 2.4 FASHION ADOPTION

Due to the rapid growth of the fashion industry, there has been increased interest and discussion around the fashion adoption theories within fashion literature (Beaudoin, Moore & Goldsmith, 2000; Johnson, Lennon, Jasper, Damhorst & Lakner, 2003; Rahman, Saleem, Akhtar, Ali & Khan, 2014). The fashion industry in Africa has undergone a huge transformation since colonial times and African fashion items are now highly demanded and available globally (Jewsiewicki, 2008). The concept of fashion adoption has been explored in previous studies by authors such as King (1963), Forsythe (1991), Rahman, Saleem, Akhtar, Ali and Khan (2014), however, the emphasis was mainly on consumer purchase decisions, culture, identity and a reflection of personal beliefs (Knight & Kim, 2007). There is, therefore, a caveat in literature regarding the adoption of Afrocentric fashion symbols and how they have been incorporated into personal branding. The **Fashion Adoption Theory** (Simmel, 1957), is relevant to this study as it provides insight into the variables that may influence the urban South African youth to adopt fashion trends (in this case, Afrocentric fashion symbols incorporated in modern designs) and to understand why they may be using these symbols to portray their overt personal brands.

Aspers and Godart (2013: 173) define fashion as “an unplanned process of recurring change, against a backdrop of order in the public realm”. With the assistance of other authors (Belleau, 1987; Luhmann, 2001; Reid, 2011) the definition is unpacked further:

- Fashion enables individuals to exercise a certain level of freedom (Aspers & Godart, 2013). Although there may be an external influence on one's fashion choice, individuals decide on their own whether they will adopt a particular fashion trend (Luhmann, 2000). For example, despite the increase in popularity

of Afrocentric fashion symbols globally, individuals who choose to represent their personal brands through this trend, do so by choice.

- Fashion is relatable (Aspers & Godart, 2013) and only when a number of people adopt a certain look can it be deemed a fashion, however, as soon as too many people adopt the phenomenon, it is then said to fall out of fashion. Aspers (2010) highlights the presence of fashion leaders such as celebrities who may influence the fashion choices of others, resulting in the spread of a fashion trend within the market.
- There is no beginning or end in fashion *per se*, thus making it a process which is extended in time (Aspers & Godart, 2013). The recurring factor in fashion occurs as it is ever-changing, enabling the phenomenon to survive through time. For example, Afrocentric fashion symbols have been in existence in the fashion market for decades, although it has evolved from colonial times with garments shifting from traditional attire and styles to adopting more current and Westernised styles (Reid, 2011).
- Fashion is also inclusive and exclusive - some individuals engage with what is fashionable to form their own identities and present their individualism, while others may follow a fashion to fit into a group and identify with other members who appreciate and wear the said fashion (Aspers & Godart, 2013). In the context of this study: While some individuals may take up Afrocentric fashion symbols to signify their identity, beliefs and value systems, others identify with it for nostalgic reasons or with the objective to connect and communicate with other like-minded individuals who feel the same. Existing research in the field of personal branding is mostly from the perspective of achieving **professional** goals (McCorkle 1992; Clare, 2002; Shepherd, 2005). The relationship between

personal branding and the achievement of **personal** and **social** goals still needs to be investigated.

- Fashion is a public phenomenon and can only exist if the items in question are observable by numerous observers. It is also essential that fashion is financially attainable for diffusion to occur (Aspers & Godart, 2013).
- Fashion needs to maintain some form of order in that fashion cannot exist in a society where there is no structure as the change of fashion is connected to a style that has existed previously (Belleau, 1987). Trends are accepted and tested over time. It is only when a particular style has stood against disruption and competition that it becomes a fashion and is not categorised as a fad. It is necessary for some form of stability to be present for fashion to occur, otherwise, it is deemed to be just a fad (Aspers & Goldart, 2013).

The next section will focus on how fashions are distributed through social systems.

## 2.5 THE DIFFUSION OF FASHION

Rogers (1995) is recognised for his contribution towards the theories on diffusion and innovation adoption, from which the **Fashion Diffusion Theory** developed. He states that the steps towards the standard process of diffusion begin with an innovation which could be represented by an idea or object, which is then distributed through certain channels to gain the attention of consumers, and lastly, then infiltrates social systems.

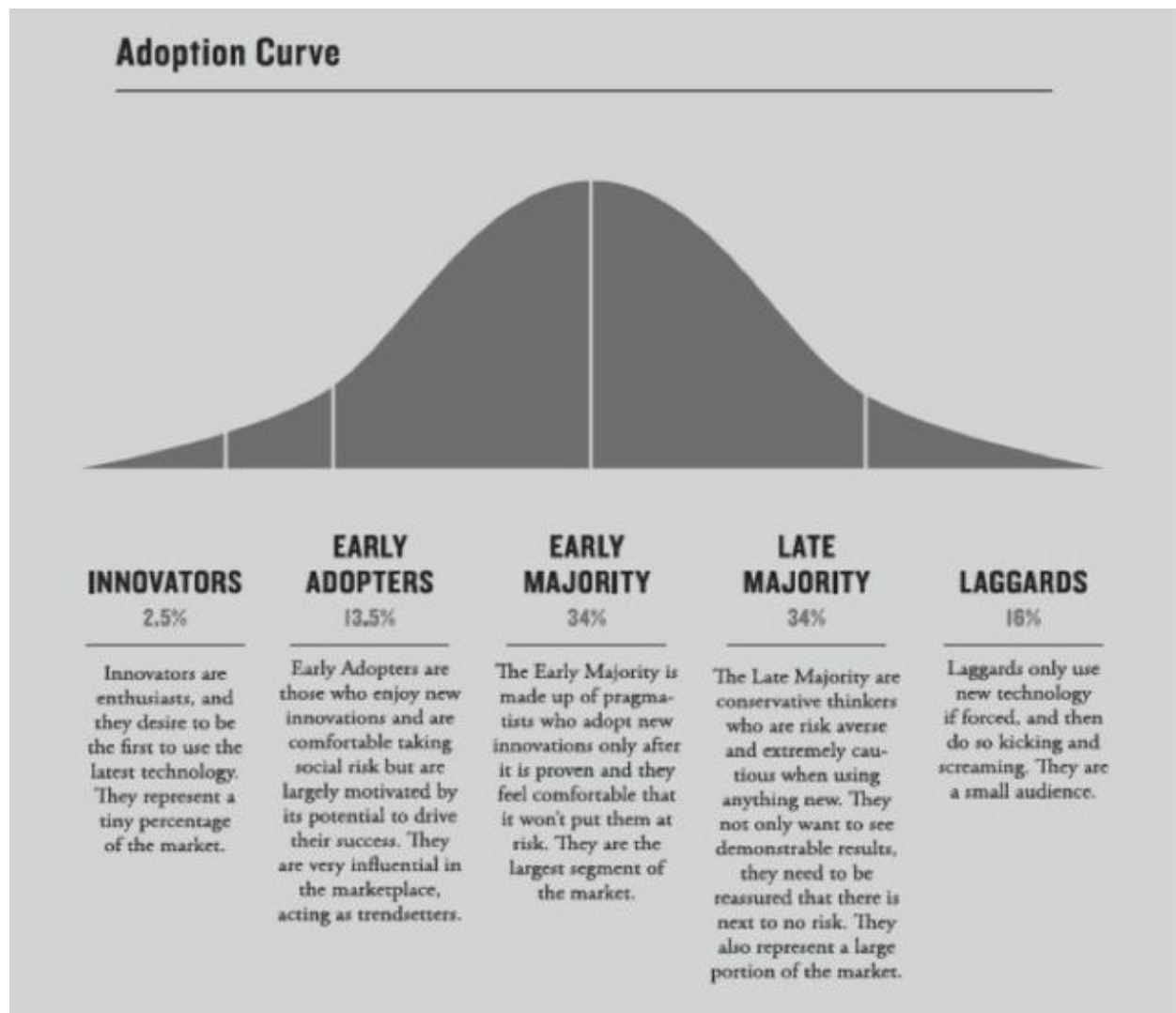


Figure 10: Maali, J. 2016.  
*The Rogers Adoption Curve & How You Spread New Ideas Throughout Culture.* (medium.com)

Davis (1992) is, however, critical of this theory as he believes the roles played by significant factors, such as time and distribution through communication channels, are not taken into greater consideration. He takes on a different view and is of the belief that to grow an understanding of fashion diffusion, it must be viewed from the perspective of the fashion process, which he defines as underlying influences and interactions among both individuals and groups that facilitate the lifespan of a trend.

Fashion adoption entails individual decision-making processes attached to the adoption of any given style (Forsythe, Butler & Kim, 1991:1). It focuses on the decision of a group of people to adopt an innovation. The traditional fashion adoption theory consists of three theories/models: the Trickle-up theory, the Trickle-down theory and the Trickle-across theory that will be discussed in more detail in the section below. These theories provide insight to researchers and fashion suppliers about the purchasing decisions of consumers and about the spread and adoption of Afrocentric fashion within social systems that may have encouraged individuals to represent their personal brands through this phenomenon.

### **2.5.1 The Trickle theories**

The Trickle theories are the most popular traditional models for tracking the diffusion of fashion and can be traced back to the 20th century when they mainly focused on differentiation and imitation (Simmel, 1957; Brannon, 2005; Polheumus, 1994).

#### **2.5.1.1 The Trickle-down Theory**

Brannon (2005) states that the adoption of fashion is based on the upper class adopting a new trend, and members of lower social classes then become followers in the hope to attain or reflect a higher social status. Social systems could consist of a city's residents or a group of friends or individuals who are in constant contact. According to Kawamura, (2005: 75) each interaction can be regarded as a form of communication by which information and influence regarding an innovation, clothing style, for example, can be spread. Regarding this study, an example of the Trickle-down theory is high-end designers creating trends which are imitated by more moderate fashion brands allowing for the lower classes to adopt and participate in the trend as well.

### **2.5.1.2 The Trickle-up Theory**

The Trickle-up theory is a reverse adoption theory that suggests that styles arise from the lower class, such as street subcultures, that maintain distinctive dress styles which attract attention and act as fashion innovators. These styles are then imitated by members of other age and class groups (Polheumus, 1994; Brannon, 2005).

### **2.5.1.3 The Trickle-across Theory**

The Trickle-across theory focuses on mass dissemination. It suggests that the global increase in mass communication has enabled fashion trends to penetrate the market and be readily available to various consumers instantly (Brannon, 2005). This can be through the use of social media avenues, magazines and television. (This aspect will be discussed in more detail in the next section). Fashion designers and manufacturers create numerous fashion styles that may appeal to various segments at different price points at the same time (Brannon, 2005; Kawamura, 2005). For this study, examples of the Trickle-across theory can be the manufacturing of the same clothing style by two retailers with different pricing points, such as a pair of shorts with African prints sold by both *Mr. Price* and *Cotton On* - the style would be similar, but different aspects, such as quality and price would attract consumers from different segments to each retailer.

The Trickle theories are relevant for this study because they explain how individuals become aware of new trends, how high-end fashion brands and designers enable the popularisation and spread of a fashion trend to lower socio-economic classes, how they borrow aspects of fashion from smaller subcultures and how the ease of communication and accessibility allows for the manufacture and adoption of a trend across various segments and socio-economic classes. Applied to this study: When top designers appropriate Afrocentric/ethnic symbols into their designs, borrowed from smaller

sub-cultures, mass communication technologies enable such trends to be widely viewed, popularised and then demanded, creating an opportunity for retailers to mass-produce the designs and to distribute them at different price points which appeal to their respective markets, resulting in the increase in demand for Afrocentric/ethnic fashion (Brannon, 2005).

Since the Trickle-across Theory relies on mass communication, it is necessary to address social media engagement.

## **2.6 SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT**

The **Social Media Engagement Theory** (Laroche, Habibi & Richard, 2012) is concerned with the role of technology in enabling social interaction amongst users located globally. The rise of social media can be attributed to an evolution in technology that facilitates a unique user experience where consumers are able to connect and interact with each other globally through various platforms that are easily accessible to them (Kaplan and Haenlien, 2010; Laroche, Habibi & Richard, 2012).

According to Kaplan and Haenlien (2010), social media is defined as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allows for the creation and exchange of user-generated content.” By using social media platforms, consumers are able to create and share marketable content that is in line with their personal brand, since it needs to be generated and shared actively in order to be consumed (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Kirtis and Karahan (2011) state that social media is widely evaluated as the most convenient tool used to reach one’s target segment, as promoting brands through social media is cost-effective and enables interactive communication between consumers who create social, as well as business relationships across the social media platforms (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011).

Regarding this study, user experience is concerned with the direct observation of or participation in activities related to daily living, adaptation and self-portrayal. User experience on social media platforms is linked to two critical factors: the experience a person attains from social interaction and the experience a person attains from technical features (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Social media interaction refers to the sharing and consuming of information amongst users through social media platforms. This provides the basis for user experience through fostering a personalised relationship amongst users. It serves as a transparent means of communication that provides access to social resources and defines the potential benefits and costs of engaging within social media (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016).

The fashion industry is beginning to recognise the importance of maintaining personal brands and is offering strategic advice about how to project a desired personal brand identity by using different social media platforms in order to increase social interaction (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011). Asur and Huberman (2010) argue that in the future, social media platforms will be used predominantly for networking purposes. Each individual has a personal brand, however, it is not enough to only possess a personal brand, one has to actively develop and maintain this brand. Good and proactive management, as well as good promotion, results in well-known brands. According to Lair, Sullivan & Cheney (2012) the terms *personal brand* and *self-branding* are not accepted by some individuals who do not believe that humans can also be brands. However, within the fashion movement, people and their styles are marketed as brands, complete with promises of performance, specialised designs, and taglines for success (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2012). Traditionally, branding literature portrays brand identity as the uniqueness of and essential idea of the brand (Kapferer, 2008). The study of

Mangold and Fauld (2009) implies that the content, timing, and frequency of social media-based conversations occur between followers outside the person's direct control.

The concept of **word-of-mouth** communication is not new and is believed to be one of the oldest methods used to transmit information, hence the numerous definitions offered by different authors (Arndt, 1967; Anderson, 2000; Dellarocas, 2003; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1996). Katz and Lazarsfeld (1996) take a marketing approach and suggest that word-of-mouth entails the sharing of marketing information amongst consumers resulting in a change in attitude and behaviour towards a product or service. Word-of-mouth has also been defined as a method of communication used between people who either take on the role of the communicator or the receiver about a brand's products or services in a non-commercial manner (Arndt, 1967). According to Anderson (2000), word-of-mouth is an informal exchange of information from one neutral individual to another concerning the evaluation of products and services.

Word-of-mouth is a very efficient and influential means of communication as a lot of credibility lies in personal recommendations (Dichter, 1966). Consumers are more inclined to trust word-of-mouth communication as it is believed to come from a neutral source as opposed to businesses that are trying to sell their products (Silverman, 2011). This results in word-of-mouth playing a very vital role in the purchasing decisions of consumers (Litvin et al., 2008). Of course, the ease of access to information through platforms such as Facebook and Instagram has impacted consumer behaviour as they are more easily connected to and influenced by their peers' experiences and preferences (Cantallops & Salvi, 2014).

Since word-of-mouth is based on the perception of goods and services from the consumers point of view, brands have minimal control over the messages that will be shared (Yang, 2017). The concept, however, allows for a deeper understanding of the

thoughts and feelings of consumers based on communication that comes directly from them (Cantalops & Salvi, 2014). The type of response by consumers, whether negative or positive, will influence the purchasing decisions of other consumers whom they may encounter.

There has been an increase in the popularity of Afrocentric fashion symbols in recent years following an increase in the positive communication that has surrounded the African continent (Jean, 2015). **Electronic word-of-mouth** (eWOM) rapidly gained popularity. eWOM can be defined as the informal relaying of messages through various platforms on the Internet in the form of reviews or recommendations about goods or services (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008). It has facilitated the shift from consumers seeking word-of-mouth advice from family and friends to taking advice and guidance from people they have never met before (Nieto, Maestro & Gallego, 2014). In 2015, Kyemah Mc'Entyre wore an African print prom dress to her prom which sparked a lot of attention with the dress going viral and trending on social media platforms, Twitter and Instagram (Jean, 2015). This resulted in numerous imitations of the dress being created, as well as Afrocentric fashion items becoming more acceptable at occasions such as proms.

The present study explored the social interactions of individuals who have overt personal brands and who use Afrocentric fashion symbols to represent their personal brands, for example, on social media platforms. Two aspects were explored: (1) The factors that shape user engagement in social media; and (2) the extent to which user engagement affects an individual's social media usage behaviour. Consumers' and followers' motives for engaging in eWOM communication were explored. Existing WOM motivation frameworks were expanded to include context-specific fashion and brand variables that influence followers to engage in eWOM on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat (Wolny & Mueller, 2013).

The usage and popularity of the smartphone has increased since 2011 and this has impacted the way consumers are able to access and interact with the world of fashion (Wilson, 2014). According to Mohr (2013), Instagram has had the most impact as it has facilitated direct access and interaction between users. This platform has been popular when it comes to exhibiting fashion as the content is raw and delivered directly from the individuals themselves – therefore, it is a direct reflection of how they perceive themselves at that point in time.

With over 200 million active users, access to fresh content from creative, like-minded people is virtually unlimited. Many fashion-forward Instagram users with large followings are able to turn their passion into a lifestyle. Fashion labels that understand this influence have harnessed the huge exposure and often pay large sums of money for featuring their clothing (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011). Penny (2015: 75) states "(C)reative fashion influencers are becoming increasingly popular channels for trending styles. Audiences view them as authoritative and trustworthy – which, in a world that is increasingly reliant on word-of-mouth over traditional communication, can be priceless."

According to Penny (2015), blogs are usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, description of events, or other material such as graphics or video. The word '*blog*' can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog". Fashion blogging has become popular since 2011. Blogs often cover fashion as a whole: personal style, reviews of clothing items and collections. Fashion bloggers have a very high status of legitimacy and those with large followings have power in the fashion world. Bloggers' success comes from being individual, relatable, achievable and having some elite status for legitimacy. The status of bloggers has shifted from amateurs to trendsetters who are often gaining invitations to the top fashion house shows during fashion week (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011). Mohr (2013:110) states

that "(o)nce considered fashion-obsessed amateurs, style bloggers have matured into fashion trendsetters and the savvy communicators command audacity from followers".

A point of critique is that there is a lack of overarching models that synthesise various elements of the individual and network experience (McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase, 2016: 200). A contribution in this regard is the following six overlapping elements of social media engagement that were studied by O'Brien and Cairns (2016: 200):

- **Presentation of self:** The crafting of a personal profile or virtual self over time signifies identity. The combination of various elements and their respective updates yields a virtual self, encompassing a user's name, lists of interests, profile picture, content the user chooses to share, and the manner in which users engage with others through social media (O'Brien and Cairns, 2016: 200).
- **Action and participation:** Social media platforms facilitate users to participate in numerous activities, such as viewing shared content, posting content, commenting, discussing and collaborating (O'Brien and Cairns, 2016: 200).
- **Uses and gratifications:** Users are propelled to engage with and continue to use social media platforms for attaining gratifications ranging from the exchange of information to social gratification.
- **Positive experiences:** These include, but are not limited to the flow of engagement, positive emotions, and serendipity (finding interesting or valuable things by chance) which users may attain while engaging with social media.

- **Usage and activity counts:** This refers to the analytical data regarding users' actions and participation on a site, which can be presented in real-time in raw or aggregate form through numeric values or visualisations (e.g. graphs).
- **Social context:** This involves the users' social connections within social media sites, encompassing the size and nature of these connections. Social context could either take on a cultural, career-related or personal nature (O'Brien and Cairns, 2016: 201).

In understanding the role of social media in creating a personal brand through the incorporation of Afrocentric fashion symbols into one's daily dress, each of the abovementioned six elements is independently useful to facilitate understanding and potentially measure engagement. Any one alone is insufficient.

One of the aspects that this study explored, was whether social media engagement can be a contributor towards the portrayal of one's personal brand and one's choice to engage with modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs.

Two aspects were important here:

- The level of brand commitment and fashion involvement as a function of motivation to incorporate Afrocentric fashion symbols in modern fashion designs into their personal brands; and
- The frequency that individuals and social groups who are motivated by fashion involvement, or have a high need for social interaction, engage in fashion brand-related eWOM compared to those who are not motivated by these factors.

## 2.7 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

The theoretical foundation presented the various theories that were utilised to structure the study. The main objective of this chapter was to provide an overview of the relevant theoretical perspectives regarding symbolic interaction, the dissemination of fashion and fashion adoption, identity management, nonverbal communication, social media engagement, and word-of-mouth/electronic word-of-mouth. A summative view is provided by the following flow-diagram:

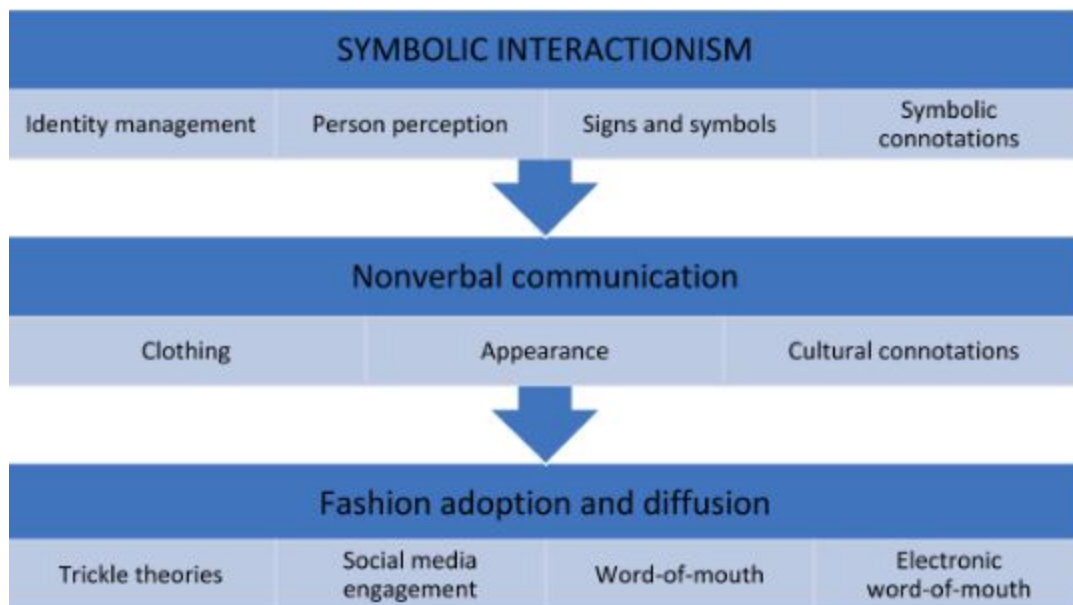


Figure 11: *Summative view of Theoretical Foundation of the study.*

A further aim of the chapter was to emphasise that the core of these perspectives is similar in so far as all of them contribute to the understanding of how social interaction and appearance lies at the heart of creating a personal brand.

As already mentioned, the two main concepts in the study were Afrocentric fashion and personal branding. Both of these are investigated in the next chapter (literature review), where the focus is on existing literature from authors and theorists in these fields in

order to place the study into perspective with regard to both seminal and recent findings related to the study's topic.

# **CHAPTER THREE**

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The literature review was undertaken to explore the most recent information and research available on the study topic, thus enabling a clearer understanding of the topic (Howard, 2014). Since information about a specific topic is always expanding, a literature review was essential as it provided information on previous research that had been conducted by scholars in the same field, which could be used as building blocks for the present study (Howard, 2014; Neuman, 2014). This chapter focused on the contributions that previous literature could make in defining the meaning and functions of fashion in general; the evolution and growing importance of Afrocentric fashion in the fashion industry; cultural appropriation and its effect on fashion; branding in general; purposes of branding; and building of personal brands in particular.

### **3.2 FASHION IN GENERAL**

According to Crane and Bovone (2006:320) “the term *fashion* has a variety of meanings for both academics and the general public, but that it is most frequently used to connote highly visible styles of clothing and less often other types of material or immaterial culture that is highly valued at a particular moment in time”. Fashion can be described in various ways such as an art form, or perception or behaviour of people, but the general understanding of the concept is often linked only to clothing (Simmel, 2001; Svendsen, 2006). Solomon and Rabolt (2004:2) assert that fashion refers to “a style that is accepted by a large group of people at a given time. It acts as a symbolic innovation, a reflection of our society and a reflection of how people define themselves”. Anne Hollander (cited in Svendsen, 2006:85), an art historian, defines fashion as “the entire spectrum of attractive clothing styles at any given time”. Elisabeth Wilson (cited in Svendsen, 2006:85), a cultural historian, also contributes towards the concept, defining

fashion as a form of dress consisting of rapid and continual style changes. According to Cheng & Huang (2010) and Solomon (2009), fashion represents a life cycle which follows six stages: innovation, rise, saturation, general acceptance, decline and fashion fallout. A fashion is initially introduced into a society by a small number of individuals leading to the formation of a trend, which is adopted by more groups until it reaches saturation and becomes outdated and is no longer desirable. Easey (2009) states that the phenomenon of fashion is constantly evolving and with the assistance of omnipresent social media platforms, consumers have an ease of access to learn about, engage with and acquire fashion items that are currently trending or which are in line with their personal styles and reflective of their identities.

Niinimäki (2010: 152) distinguishes between clothes and fashion by saying that “fashion is actually a ‘symbolic production’. As a concept, it differs from clothing, which is a material production and something that fulfils people’s physical needs for protection and functionality. Fashion merges people with their emotional needs; it expresses their inner individual personalities through external signs and symbols, brands and status items”. This view correlates with Gwozdz et al (2013: 12), who states that “fashion goes beyond providing protection or simply canvassing the body – it is an expression of the self, a form of communication between the self and others and a way of expressing lifestyle and values that one lives or aspires to”. Fashion also refers to a consumption activity that is a part of one’s identity-making process and provides symbolic, immaterial and hedonistic value to the consumer beyond the needs based on the benefits that a simple garment might offer (Meyer, 2001; Dobers & Strannegard, 2005; Gwozdz et al., 2013; Peattie, 2001). Therefore, fashion consumption can be viewed as the use of clothing for purposes beyond practical needs and should be viewed as an ongoing process in which people engage to consume an idea or symbol, to construct a lifestyle and identity, and to achieve well-being (Meyer, 2001; Peattie, 2001). Belk (1988: 151) argues that “while the consumption of products other than fashion might also fulfill functions beyond the

physical need level, fashion takes a special role, as it provides a 'second skin', an extension of the self that communicates certain information to others".

Although research on the fashion industry has grown in importance within the field of market research and consumer behaviour (Goldsmith & Flynn, 1996; Gwozdz, Netter, Bjartmarz & Reisch, 2013; Kumar, 2017), clearly there are many other social aspects related to fashion, including aspects such as identity formation and being a platform where individuals can stand out and display their individuality (Meyer, 2001; Peattie, 2001; Simmel, 2001; Svendsen, 2006). Cheng and Huang (2010) define fashion as a lifestyle and cultural phenomenon prevalent at a point in time and portrayed as an individual's interest in the ideology. Simmel (2001) points out that fashion is also considered to be a unifying factor as it creates a platform for individuals from different social backgrounds to integrate with one another through the use of the same product. On the other hand, it may create a means of segregation where groups can distinguish themselves through certain styles and exclude others who do not follow or fit in with their style.

It seems that fashion plays a vital role within the social context as it serves as a reflection of an individual or a group's identity, culture, class and gender, and enables interaction and the creation of relationships and links between a diverse group of people who may share or identify with a similar fashion sense (Wilson, 2003; Rovine, 2004). For example, social media platforms, such as Instagram and Facebook allow for a variety of individuals from vast cultures and locations to connect through shared interests, to develop relationships and exchange knowledge across borders (Skov, 2006).

Investigating the above-mentioned social aspects of fashion are relevant to answer the sub-question of this study, namely whether there is a relationship between using

modernised Afrocentric designs for personal brand building and the fulfillment of personal and social needs.

### **3.3 AFROCENTRIC FASHION**

As mentioned previously, Afrocentric fashion refers to styles and trends worn by African people or those of African descent and others who appreciate the beauty and meaning of African prints and patterns made from an array of materials, such as beads, mud cloth, barkcloth, kitenge, kente and many others (Van Dyk, 2015; Evans, 2017). Clothing categorised under Afrocentric fashion design contains specific patterns and symbols that bear meaning from their place of origin. The Ndebele tribe of Southern Africa, for example, is known for the abstract geometric shapes they adorn their fabrics in to showcase their creativity and individuality (Clark, 2009). For example, after marriage, an Ndebele bride would adorn a marriage blanket called an 'nguba', which she would decorate with different beadwork to highlight different milestones, such as long beaded strips to indicate that her son was undergoing the initiation ceremony (Smith, 2017).



Figure 12: Smith, A. 2017.  
*A Ndebele woman adorned in traditional Ndebele blanket reserved for married women.*  
(buzzsouthafrica.com, 2017)

According to Jennings (2017), there has been an evolution in African fashion and currently, Afrocentric fashion designs can be categorised as either traditional or modern. Traditional Afrocentric fashion can be described as garments or items that are regarded as a national dress and specifically used to mark special occasions or ceremonies (refer to section 1.3.2 for an illustration). A further example is in the Xhosa culture, a newly married woman wears a black *iduku* (headpiece) to symbolise that she is newly married. After she has given birth, she can then move on to wear a headscarf of any colour - this headscarf has now evolved into an iconic symbol of Xhosa culture and is now worn by all Xhosa women to both traditional and modern events (Gold, 2017). These fashion items exist in numerous styles originating from different regions of the continent and the type of cloth used plays a pivotal role in the fashioning of the garment (Evans, 2017). Modernised Afrocentric fashion designs, on the other hand, are modern-day interpretations of African fashion (Mosiane, 2017). It entails using traditional and

traditional-inspired fabrics, symbols and accessories to create cuts, symbols and designs that follow current trends in the fashion industry (Mosiane, 2017). (Refer to section 1.3.3 for an illustration.) Modernised Afrocentric fashion designs came about as a result of drawing on ancient dressing practices and fusing them with seasonal trends, such as crop tops and miniskirts, which has resulted in African fashions and symbols being sought-after items in the global fashion market. With the evolution and modernisation of Afrocentric fashion items, garments are now being consumed widely by the masses as these items are now more relatable, fashionable and accessible. This has resulted in Afrocentric fashion items having a significant impact on the global fashion industry (Jennings, 2017).

The above view is supported by Rovine (2013), who asserts that Afrocentric fashion has evolved from being traditionally perceived as a symbol of African culture and tradition to fashion collections by international fashion designers featuring certain elements and motifs from African cultures, showcased on runways, in fashion blogs on the internet and on social media platforms (Jennings, 2017). Western designers are borrowing various motifs from African cultures without directly referencing Africa as their source of inspiration (Rovine, 2013).

Afrocentric fashion has become an escalating influence in the broader fashion industry which was previously hesitant to embrace African features as symbols of beauty. As stated in Chapter 1, although aspects such as animal prints have been around for many years, a new focus on more modern African fabrics and prints has relatively recently been incorporated into the global fashion industry (Wilson, 1994; Rovine, 2013). Although these fashions seem to be very popular all over the world, this study investigated whether they are purposefully used to establish and reinforce personal branding. Obviously, the fashion industry strives to understand their target markets (affirmed by inter alia Ventures Africa, 2014). Therefore, the new, more modern use of

African cultural symbols may provide a unique opportunity for the fashion industry to gain more insight into the motivations behind the purchasing behaviour of consumers. It may also provide insight into a possible relationship between using modernised Afrocentric designs for personal brand building and the fulfillment of other personal and social needs.

There has been a positive and healthy growth in Afrocentric fashion phenomena as more people are beginning to identify with not only this type of dress, but also with how the style influences interpretation of one's appearance. It has gained substantially more ground in the fashion field as it is growing in popularity, not only in its continent of origin, Africa but throughout the world. Since 2002, references to Africa have increasingly appeared in haute couture collections on European and American runways with Africa manifesting as a muse for a wide array of designers, such as Donna Karan, Kenzo and Dolce and Gabbana (Reid, 2011; Rovine, 2015).

Recently, there have been substantial developments in the global perception of African fashions. They are no longer regarded as “traditional” wear or as lacking in sophistication by the Western markets. With the increase in popularity of Afrocentric fashion globally, two types of “fashioned Africa” have arisen, one in which international designers have borrowed motifs from the African continent to incorporate into their designs, and, secondly, creations by designers from Africa (Rovine, 2009; Austin 2012). The shift in perception of African fashion is evident through the increased use of Afrocentric fashion elements by international designers in their collections, for instance, the use of feathers and beadwork, as well as an increase in the number of African designers showcasing their designs on international runways worldwide (Reid, 2011; Austin, 2012; Rovine, 2015).

In his exploration of the Afrocentric fashion concept, Olshin (2006) pays particular

attention to the Ghanaian market. He states that Ghanaian clothing styles have shifted away from the more traditional attire to adopt and incorporate modernised and Westernised styles. He explains that Ghanaian attire was shunned during pre-colonial times as it was regarded as primitive and that it resulted in the adaptation of Western fashion by Ghana, introduced by missionaries. With the increasing presence and influence of globalisation, however, Ghanaian garments have become more popular and accepted. Ghanaians have resorted back to fashion styles that symbolise their identity and pride in their country and international fashion industries that had previously dissociated with such styles, are now adopting and using it in their daily clothing and dress (Olshin, 2006).

Patrick (2005) points out that Afrocentric fashion symbols have been popularised in Western markets since prominent designer Yves Saint Laurent's "Africaine" collection in 1972. This support from a renowned designer helped to shift public perception which formerly deemed African fashion symbols as being primitive and reserved for those of African descent. The Afrocentric fashion trend has now been adopted by Western societies to highlight their connection and association with the African continent, more so, the garments have been incorporated into the daily fashion styles of African Americans as a show of nostalgia and a need to embrace their history and heritage (Patrick 2005).

Afrocentric fashion symbols have previously been preserved by the African continent to symbolise the culture and tradition of the societies that the particular garb represents, hence the limited production of these items and their exclusion from Western markets (Rabbine, 2002; Jennings, 2017). Wearing African clothing is for many people a wonderful way to celebrate their culture and their heritage and to commemorate the beauty of the continent as opposed to simply making a fashion statement. Most designers in Africa do not create clothes simply for appearance sake - each symbol,

colour, and even the shape of the clothing item can have a very specific purpose or meaning, for example, it can be a symbol of status, creativity and allegiance to tribal roots (Allman, 2004).

According to Fosah (1969), the fabrics used in Afrocentric fashion garments have a quintessential look stemming from vibrant fabrics, woven into long specific sized panels that are then sewn together to make clothing for both men and women. The patterns created by the brightly coloured threads often represent common motifs, religious beliefs, political commentary, financial or social status (Siamonga, 2017). The colours are of particular significance as they interpret the meaning of the pattern. Some patterns are rich in cultural significance, referring to historical events such as famous battles, mythological concepts or proverbs. The following list indicates some of the main colours found in African clothing and fashions, as well as their meanings to African people (Fosah, 1969; Reddock, 2014). There can be variations in the meanings depending on the group of people that is studied, however, in general, the following are the most common meanings for commonly used colours in Africa:

- **Gold:** Gold is an extremely popular colour, which represents wealth and fertility.
- **Red:** Red represents tension in the spiritual or political world and is viewed as the colour of blood.
- **Blue:** Blue is a harmonious colour that represents love and peace and it symbolises the sky.
- **Green:** Green represents prosperity and life and is also a medicinal colour.
- **White:** White represents spirituality and purity (Fosah, 1969; Reddock, 2014).

Africans take the meanings and spirituality of the colours in their clothes very seriously. Choosing an African garment to wear can mean a lot more than choosing a style that flatters an individual. People truly experience Africanism by choosing a colour or fabric

that has a significant meaning to them or to the culture (Wanzie, 1964; Fosah, 1969; Reddock, 2014).

The Western take on Afrocentric fashion differs as garments are standardised and mass-produced to fulfil the demand from consumers with little or no sentimental value added to the fashion items that are being produced. The incorporation of Western styles into more traditional African fashion designs/symbols may have therefore influenced their popularity in the Western markets as these garments are now standardised and more relatable to a diverse group of consumers (Hansen, 2004).

The combination of Afrocentric and Western styles in a single garment or outfit is a direct confrontation of Western fashion, especially if the clothing does not simultaneously promote an Afrocentric theme. Afrocentric fashion consists of numerous textiles, for example, Ghanaian kente cloth, batik, mud cloth, indigo cloth, and to a lesser extent, barkcloth. Interestingly, dashikis, Abacos, Kangas, caftans, wraps, and Saki robes are all made in kente, batik, and mud cloth, but are also made in plain cotton, polyesters, glittery novelty fabrics and tiger, leopard, and zebra prints (Van Dyk, 2015; Evans, 2017). Clothing items that do not assimilate well in everyday life are less popular. These are grand items such as the West African Buba, which can be a voluminous floor-length robe that is often embroidered at the neckline and worn both by men and women. Various types of accessories such as skullcaps, Kofi's, turbans, and Egyptian and Ghanaian-inspired jewelry are worn with other Afrocentric items or separately with Western items. Afrocentric fabrics that are made into ties, purses, graduation cowls, and pocket-handkerchiefs have special significance within the middle-class African community. The most significant expression of Afrocentricity in Africa is the long-doned fashions and apparel from long ago. Prototype items consist of dashikis, various versions of Afro hairstyles, and to a lesser extent Nehru jackets, caftans, and djellabas for men. Women adopted Yoruba-style head wraps, batik wrap

skirts, and African inspired jewelry like cowrie shells. For both men and women, the latter items remain Afrocentric (Van Dyk, 2015).

According to Van Dyk (2015), Afrocentric fashion items do not ordinarily feature fine linen dresses, kilts, collars, or the application of kohl to one's eyes, but consist of selected clothing motifs and long-established textile, production, and cutting methods from the rest of Africa. Afrocentric fashion references the clothing traditions of multicultural Africa, including the traditions of both the colonizers and the colonized (Van Dyk, 2015). The new wave of Afrocentric fashion items which take influence from Western fashions, such as the short skirts and crop tops made from African print material, have been influenced by globalisation which has enabled ease in the sharing of information and inspiration around the world (Hansen, 2004).

### **3.4 GLOBALISATION**

In this study, globalisation is seen as the process of increased interconnectivity between the countries in the world through the ease of flow of capital, goods, services, information and cultures across borders (Burgh-Woodman, 2014). Traditionally, globalisation focused mainly on economies and societies, however, with the increased flow of information, there has been an increase in consumers operating across borders to enhance their economic well-being and livelihood (Burgh-Woodman, 2014: 32).

For consumers in Western countries, globalisation entails access to an abundance of clothing and fashion items sold by giant retailers who have the ability to quickly update inventories, make global trade deals, and coordinate worldwide distribution of goods, all with the click of a button on their computers. Consumers are becoming less concerned with the actual clothing items that they purchase and more focused on the brands that are selling them, such as Nike, Adidas, Victoria's Secret, or Abercrombie & Fitch. They

are buying into the fantasy images of sexual power, athleticism, cool attitude, or carefree joy that these brands emulate in lavish, ubiquitous, hyper-visible marketing through high-tech electronic media. As a result of the ease with which items can be acquired globally, less emphasis is placed on the effect of globalisation on the production of fashion (Anderson, 2000).

Kaiser (1999:110) affirms that fashion images in magazines, music videos, films and on the Internet speed their way around the world, creating a 'global style' across borders and cultures. Blue jeans, T-shirts, athletic shoes and baseball caps adorn bodies everywhere from Manhattan to villages in Africa. Asian, African and Western fashion systems borrow style and textile elements from each other. Large shopping malls in wealthy countries stock all these styles under one roof. Like high-tech global bazaars, they cater to consumers of every age, gender, ethnicity, profession, and subculture.

Since the early 1980s, transnational corporations, cyber technology, and electronic mass media have spawned a web of tightly linked networks that cover the globe. Through the collaboration of the above-mentioned sources, there has been a profound restructuring in the world economy, global culture, and individual fashion and preferences. The biggest changes can be noted in the ways clothing and fashions are produced, marketed, sold, bought, worn, and thrown away (Kalantaridis, Slava & Sochka, 2003: 23). While shopping malls in every city have the same stores and sell the same fashion items, there exists a wide variety of variables within these fashion items that distinguish them from each other. An example can be a pair of jeans - there are numerous types of cuts and fits, from stretched tight to billowing baggy; from at-the-waist to almost-below-the-hip; from bell-bottom to tapered at the ankle; from long enough to wear with stiletto heels to cropped below the calf, amongst others. While a somewhat baggy, relaxed cut can signify dignified middle-aged femininity, a baggy cut taken to excess can signify hyper-masculine ghetto street smarts. Each variation takes

its turn as a fleeting and arbitrary signifier of shifting identities based on age, gender, ethnicity, or subculture (Kalantaridis, Slava and Sochka, 2003: 23).

Contrary to fashion magazines, corporations such as *The Wall Street Journal* continuously monitor consumer behaviour - minutely measured by the Consumer Confidence Index (Weiss 2003). In this view, consumption is neither personal nor individual, but necessary for upholding a vast, intricate global capitalist economy that is not only dependent on massive fashion consumption in the wealthier countries, but also on massive amounts of cheap labour from poorer countries (Weiss, 2003).

In the recently concluded 2018 Russia FIFA World Cup, the Nigerian National Team (the Super Eagles), adorned a green jersey with typical African print from Nigeria. Individuals who were conscious of Afrocentric fashion symbols were appreciative of this and it was greatly praised on social media platforms. This then resulted in an increased level of support from individuals who understood and empathised with the symbolism attached to the jersey (Wolf, 2018).

Globalisation is relevant to this study because it has enabled the transfer of knowledge, information and acquisition of Afrocentric fashion items. Individuals all over the world can access the latest trends and purchase items globally, which has expanded the territory and area of influence of Afrocentric fashion items. Examples are celebrities and fashion designers in the West who have been seen incorporating modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs in their daily attire and runway collections (Figure 13 below).



Figure 13: Akinwale, A. and Obinna, H. 2019.  
*Award-winning American celebrity Rihanna wearing an Ankara dress to go about her day.*  
(guardian.ng, 2019)

### 3.5 CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

Cultural appropriation occurs when cultural symbols, artefacts and rituals are taken or borrowed from a culture that is not one's own, without giving reference to the latter (Schneider, 2003; Rogers, 2006). Applied to clothing and fashion, Stechyson (2017) found that it occurs when international designers create interest and trends in their collections through the use of borrowed motifs from less well-known cultures. This is an inevitable practice when different cultures come into contact with each other, be it virtually or physically. The acts of appropriation, as well as the resulting factors, are not an indication of the intent of those who are involved, however, they enable a shift in the mindset of the social, political and economic contexts in which they occur (Rogers, 2006; Stechyson, 2017). As there is increasing access to information globally, people are continuously exposed to aspects from different cultures, which has facilitated the borrowing of Afrocentric motifs by modern fashion designs. This exposure may encourage individuals to incorporate these designs into their values and lifestyles, hence reflecting a shift in the perception of the African continent (Rogers, 2006).

Anyia (2017) asserts that the act of cultural appropriation serves as an indication of the effects of globalisation and highlights the fact that although the world is becoming increasingly connected, it may not be similarly unified. The ease with which information can travel across borders, be it from travel experiences, social media or literature, has enabled the boundaries set across cultures to be more permeable as we are now exposed to a magnitude of cultures with which we may freely interact and learn from, leading to the inevitable result of exchange, as well as appropriation. Cultural appropriation can be seen in a positive light as it is a clear reflection of the acceptance of a particular culture, especially in instances where the culture was formerly marginalised. However, the concept can also pose a threat to the culture being appropriated as it could very easily result in the dilution of the traditions and heritage attached to the symbols that are being appropriated (Nicholas, 2017). There is a dire need to maintain boundaries amongst cultures in order to preserve culture and heritage. The symbol or motif that is being appropriated is now perceived as a commodity and the

basis for engagement by the masses is factored around its aesthetic value, which in turn devalues the intrinsic significance of the motif within the culture from which it is being borrowed (Anya, 2017; Nicholas, 2017).

Durosomo (2017) found that international fashion designers have incorporated various African fashion symbols ranging from hairstyles, traditional prints and beads, amongst others, into their collections without directly crediting the African continent and its diverse cultures for their inspiration. For their 2012 collection, luxury brand, *Burberry*, drew inspiration from East Africa when they incorporated the kitenge material into the collection's designs. When the brand was questioned about the collection's association with Africa, designers denied any association with the African continent, thus robbing Africa of credibility (Durosomo, 2017). More recently, fashion house, *Valentino*, used Afrocentric fashion symbols in the form of beads, feathers, fringes and cornrow hairstyles on their models for their Spring/Summer ready-to-wear collection. The brand received a lot of international backlash as the models were predominantly white and the message that accompanied the collection was "tolerance and the beauty that comes out of cross-culture expressions". The narrative surrounding the collection was more diminishing than appreciative to the African culture from which inspiration was drawn (Markovinivic, 2016).

Another example would be *Victoria's Secret* 2017 fashion show where one of the segments, "Nomadic Adventures", incorporated Maasai tribal necklaces on models whose purpose was not to dignify the culture from which the aesthetic elements were borrowed, but rather amplified how the brand has used the beads to make beautiful fashion statements, all without paying reference to the Maasai culture (Stechyson, 2017). See Figure 14 below.



Figure 14: Stechyson, N. 2017.  
*Victoria Secret* model walking the runway for their nomadic adventure category.  
(huffingtonpost.ca, 2017)

In terms of morality, cultural appropriation may be found to be problematic when socially marginalised cultures are misrepresented by dominant cultures (Matthes, 2016; Stechyson, 2017). The question arises whether the use of Afrocentric motifs by international designers is beneficial or detrimental to Africa as these symbols, which hold deep-rooted meaning, are now being diluted and possibly misappropriated. Matthes (2016) is of the opinion that cultural appropriation is deemed harmful for the marginalised cultures as it is a form of oppression by the adopting culture. He states that Afrocentric symbols that may have had a deep and rich meaning for particular cultures, may be mass-produced and their significance watered down and altered, due to the dominance of the adopting cultures. Nicholas (2017) supports this view and found that designers in the fashion industry seek creative ideas from around the globe and then incorporate various elements borrowed and inspired from different cultures into their collections. He (Nicholas) points out that these borrowings have been going on for long periods of time and are often overlooked within the fashion industry, except in cases where the element borrowed from a specific culture crosses over from a form of inspiration into the appropriation of a symbol which holds sentimental value for the heritage and traditions of the culture from which it has been borrowed. Designers' creations are then seen as detrimental and inappropriate, especially when no reference and appreciation has been shown to whomever the motif was borrowed from - this is an especially common trend between western designers and African culture. Bubman (2017) also asserts that today's society has been known to box black people who practise black culture as being stereotypical while commending and labelling white people who exploit elements of black culture as trendsetters and being fashion-forward. He gives an example of how Africans have been scrutinised for decades about hairstyles, such as dreadlocks and cornrows, which hold significant meaning to various cultures, while white celebrities, such as Kylie Jenner and Miley Cyrus, have been praised for incorporating the same styles, which are then deemed to be edgy and fashion-forward.

Young and Brunk (2012) disagree with this view and state that although cultural appropriation may not stand ground when it comes to morality, it is rarely a danger to the cultures that have been appropriated. There may be a lack in the ability to portray the meaning of these fashions, but, on the other hand, people gain knowledge and insight about cultures that they previously would not have interacted with. They are exposed to different motifs that they may not be exposed to in their own cultures. It is argued that cultural appropriation, therefore, facilitates making Afrocentric fashion symbols more approachable, wearable and interpretable across the globe and is a unique opportunity for the fashion industry to create trends that are relatable across various segments (Ventures Africa, 2014). In terms of this study, individuals who choose to incorporate modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs in their daily lives to represent their personal brands may, therefore, gain a more global understanding of the message they communicate.

The next section focuses on branding in general.

### **3.6 BRANDING**

Wood (2000) states that branding as a topic is not new in the world of research and numerous authors and researchers have defined it. They have evaluated all aspects of the phenomenon, including its purpose and characteristics, from the perspective of the shareholders, as well as companies. The American Marketing Association (1960) defines branding as the name, symbol, design or combination of all three used to identify the goods and services provided by a company which sets them apart from their competitors. Keller (1998) found that branding creates mental associations in the minds of consumers, which in turn enhances the perceived value of the products and services on offer. Branding aims to interlink management decisions with consumer reception, creating an identity, building awareness and attaching meaning to the product offering

(Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). The concept of branding is predominantly defined in relation to its role in business. It refers to the tools with which a company equip itself that enables the promotion of its product offering with the end goal of profit for the company. The act of branding a company can be deemed successful when the brand promise lives up to the consumers' expectations (LePla & Parker, 2002; Gallagher & Savard, 2009).

According to Blackett (2003), the overall objective of a brand is to create long-lasting impressions in the minds of consumers. A brand's name, logo and slogan amongst others should be easily recalled and recognised by the public. Once consumers can link a brand's attributes directly back to the brand, it is said to have achieved success. For example, in the fashion industry, when consumers come across shoes with red soles, they are able to directly link them to designer Christian Louboutin. Branding therefore encompasses more than the name and symbols attached to a company, it also takes into consideration the emotions consumers attach to the performance and product offerings of a company (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). Branding does not merely focus on the goods or services offered by a company, but entails the essence, purpose and vision of the brand, identifying it in time and space (Kapferer, 1992).

Insight into the phenomenon of branding also facilitates an understanding of personal branding.

### **3.7 PERSONAL BRANDING**

Personal branding entails managing and transmitting desired perceptions of an individual, group or organisations' beliefs and values to observers on a daily basis (Ellis, 2009). It is a direct indication of an individual's lifestyle, culture and beliefs and involves the development and execution of strategies that are aligned to the individual's brand

(Peters 1997; Gehl, 2011; Kang, 2013; Schau & Gilly, 2003).

Similar to traditional brands, personal brands are built on three main pillars, namely brand identity, brand positioning and brand image (Roper & Fill, 2012).

### **3.7.1 Brand identity**

This refers to the backbone of the brand, considering what it stands for and entails its promise, values and personality. Applied to personal branding, individuals need to clearly define and portray their personalities and values in order to communicate what their brand stands for (Rampersad, 2009; Roper & Fill, 2012).

### **3.7.2 Brand positioning**

This entails the added value of the brand that differentiates it from its competitors. For personal brand building individuals need to offer a unique selling point to adequately position themselves in the marketplace and break away from the clutter (Peters, 1997; Keller, 2000).

### **3.7.3 Brand image**

Brand image refers to the perceptions and associations relating to a brand - the way consumers picture a brand and communicate about it. It can be associated with personal branding in the sense that a personal brand is dictated and constructed based on how the public chooses to perceive and associate the brand (Keller, 2000; Rampersad, 2009). In order to effectively establish a strong personal brand, it is

essential that individuals maintain a personal brand image which is strong and consistent throughout all mediums. For example, their choice of speech, dress and behaviour should correlate in all the areas where they choose to represent themselves (Everett, 2008). Morton (2011) found that social media platforms have created an ease of management and preservation of one's personal brand as the individual is in direct control of all the content they choose to share with their publics. For personal brands to dominate their fields, it is crucial to keep on track with current information (e.g. via social media platforms). This will ensure that they remain relevant in the eyes of their publics and will reward them with credibility and ensure that publics look up to them when they need clarity regarding their specialised field (Allen, 2011). In the context of this study, if individuals want to tie their personal brands to modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs, their selection of daily clothing needs to incorporate some forms of these symbols and designs in their own unique ways to ensure that observers can clearly identify these cues and immediately associate the individual with modernised Afrocentric fashion.

All individuals have unique and specific aspects that define and shape their personalities, and which influence how others perceive them – which is in effect a representation of their personal brands. Kang (2013) defines personal branding as the process individuals go through in order to develop strategies and executions that are aligned to their brand. An individual's personal brand should be a clear and precise indication of the person's values, purpose and goals (Rampersad, 2009).

According to Arruda (cited in Shepherd, 2005:590), personal branding is a planned process that takes place in three stages. During the first stage (**extraction**) individuals need to find a unique selling point to offer to the marketplace. The second stage is **expression**, where the individual formulates an adequate way to clearly communicate this uniqueness to the target market and last, but not least, **exudation** occurs which

entails finding ways to implement this personal brand to ensure that the individual is always associated with it. Individuals create their personal brands for advancement, whether in their professional or social capacities. It is therefore crucial that they strategically manage their brands and ensure consistency to ensure personal branding success.

Peter Montoya (1997; 2009) was one of the first pioneers of the personal branding concept and he asserts that it is vital for all individuals, despite their career paths and occupations, to understand the importance of branding oneself. He emphasises that the daily choices we make, such as the clothing we choose to wear, the brands we interact with, and our personal values are all indications of our personal brands and ways for individuals to influence the way the public perceive them. For example, those who choose to wear Afrocentric fashions may be representing their African roots or appreciation for the culture.

Other authors who touch on the subject are Labrecque, Markos and Milne (2011) who state that the purpose of personal branding is to identify and portray one's strengths and uniqueness which distinguishes one from the crowds and enables one to appeal to one's target audience. Personal branding provides an effective means of communication between individuals and their respective publics and sets them apart from their competitors through acknowledging and displaying their unique selling points and values (Morton, 2011). Personal branding enables one to establish oneself in one's respective field by actively showcasing who one is and what one believes in. Individuals may choose various mediums, such as dress and speech, to further portray how they have creatively chosen to attain maximum value, be it for their personal brand or a commercial one (Barnett, 2010).

There is a common misconception that the concept of personal branding is specific to celebrities and famous people. However, all individuals represent brands and can adopt strategies enforced by big brands to successfully build their own personal brands. Personal branding is for everyone and is crucial for individuals who wish to attain professional success, as people are more willing to invest in a brand with a unique selling point. All individuals have a brand - the question is whether or not they manage their personal brands efficiently. It is argued that individuals themselves are brands and they build equity from being themselves (Arruda, 2002; Schwabel, 2009).

Therefore, a personal brand can be understood as the dominating and concise perception that we attach to individuals based on their beliefs and values that enables observers to answer questions, such as: who are you; what do you do; and how do you differentiate yourself from the rest? Building a personal brand enables people to influence the way others perceive them and use this perception as an opportunity to fulfil personal goals which could either be career-focused or social (Montoya & Vandehey, 2003).

According to Rampersad (2009), in order to establish a successful personal brand, it is necessary for an individual to effectively control and manage how s/he is perceived in a public space, through merging the expectations, images and perceptions in a viewer's mind when an individual's name is presented to them in whichever form, be it visually or audial. For example, if individuals represent themselves through Afrocentric fashion symbols, their core beings should incorporate the phenomenon in such a way that when they come to mind, the first thought a perceiver would have, is their Afrocentric nature.

Tom Peters (1997), a pioneer of the personal brand phenomenon, states that all individuals are capable of representing themselves as a brand (Labrecque et al., 2011). Other authors, such as Montonya & Vandehey, (2002) and Schawbel (2009), have built

the concept, placing emphasis on the benefits of possessing a successful personal brand. Many articles are available on the Internet regarding personal branding, offering advice and suggestions on how to create, maintain and execute successful personal brands (Barnett, 2010). Most of the literature on personal branding, however, focuses on the concept in relation to the workplace and gaps exist regarding personal branding in social settings and more particularly, how a specific choice of clothing can create, enhance and enable individuals to maintain their personal brands.

Shepherd (2005) states that although fairly new, the personal brand concept has long been practised by individuals who take on a profession within the public eye, such as sportsmen and television personalities. Arruda (2003) highlights that personal branding is highly associated with the communication field as it is a form of communication used by individuals regarding their attributes and personalities, setting them apart from others. The increasing importance of globalisation, as well as social media platforms, create a space where individuals are exposed to a wide audience and it creates a need for authenticity through various cues, such as clothing choice, to establish one's personal brand in order to successfully carry out self-marketing (Shepherd, 2005). Authors, such as Clare (2002), highlight the need to build personal brands to ensure that people can accomplish their professional goals and compete with their peers. The main aim of personal branding, according to McCorkle (1992), is to project and communicate a person's strengths as an individual so as to attain his/her professional goals. As mentioned above, literature regarding the personal brand concept is mainly focused on the achievement of professional goals (Clare, 2002) and personal and social goals have been under-explored. Therefore, this study investigated the possible relationship between personal branding and the achievement of personal and social goals, specifically, through clothing choice.

Montoya (2003) states that we are constantly exposed to individuals whom we do not know on a personal basis, but of whom we know something about through either actual or assumed information. The information that we assume may be gathered from qualities the individual portrays, such as their choice of clothing, the brands they associate with and their lifestyle choices, amongst others. All these aspects constitute their personal brand as these are all qualities that they want us to believe they possess.

It is impossible to avoid personal branding as we automatically form perceptions of people based on the impression they make when we encounter them. To create one's personal brand, both internal and external factors are taken into consideration. External factors comprise the different ways in which one projects oneself to the public and how one chooses to portray oneself. It is, therefore, crucial to be authentic and project who one really is. Internal factors include the way one feels and thinks about oneself (Pavlina, 2010; Klopper & North, 2011). In relation to this study, individuals may be proud of the African culture or want to portray their roots and therefore choose to do this through consistently incorporating Afrocentric fashion symbols in modern fashion designs into their clothing choices.

Clare (2005) and McCorkle (1992) focus on the use of personal branding to attain career and professional success. However, they do not discuss the benefits of purposefully establishing a personal brand to achieve goals outside of that scope. As stated by Schwabel (2009), all individuals possess personal brands whether they intend to build and develop them or not. There are reasons apart from career success why people choose to establish personal brands, such as, to fulfill personal or social goals (Shepherd, 2005). Therefore, the sub-question of this study aimed to establish whether there is a link between using modernised Afrocentric designs for personal brand building and the fulfillment of personal and social needs.

In order to identify interrelated ideas and concepts and to integrate these in a logical manner that might address the research problems, a conceptual framework was developed (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Adom, et al., 2018).

### **3.8 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY**

In today's complex world, qualitative researchers cannot use only one theory as a framework to guide their investigations and interpret their research findings (Flick 2010:30). The conceptual framework for this study was developed from the theories and literature review discussed in chapters 2 and 3 and both deductive and inductive reasoning was used. A deductive study requires developing a conceptual framework based on existing literature and theories before analysing the data (Flick 2010: 30).

The conceptual framework facilitated a visually conceptualisation of how the research problems would be explored by linking the concepts and factors from the literature and theories relevant to the study (Peshkin, 1993). It highlighted the relationship between the main concepts of the study and illustrated how different ideas/concepts are linked to each other (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). The conceptual framework is provided in figure 14 below.

#### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR STUDY**

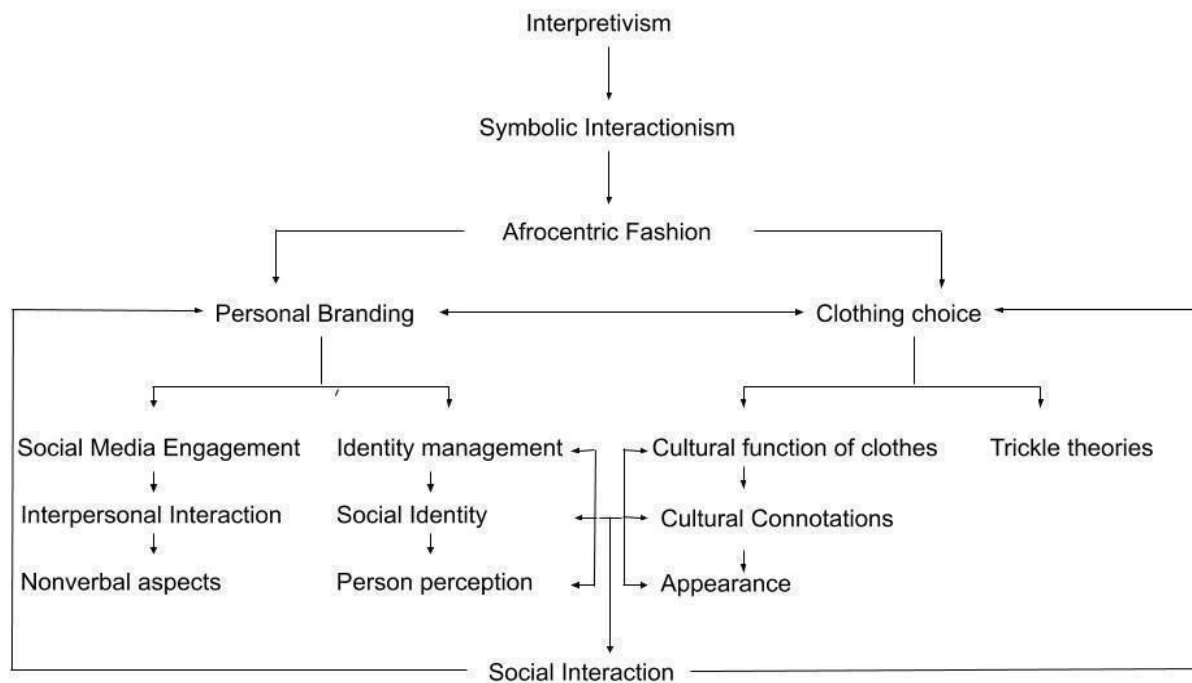


Figure 15: Conceptual framework for addressing the research questions of the study.

### 3.9 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

Individuals communicate through the clothing they choose to wear. People cautiously choose which designs, signs and symbols to incorporate into their daily attire so as to portray various messages, such as their identity, economic status, religion and social role amongst others. Individuals convey these messages through direct interpersonal contact, as well as through social media platforms, which, due to globalisation, enable them to have a wide audience around the entire world with whom they can engage. The presence of these social media platforms allows for individuals with overt personal brands, who choose to incorporate modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs into their daily lives and personal brands, to express their identities and personal beliefs, as well as to keep up with the trends and evolution of the Afrocentric

fashion movement. It seems that personal branding is therefore not only useful for marketing purposes but must also be useful for fulfilling personal or social needs.

The theoretical foundation and literature review of this study facilitated a deeper understanding as to what messages may be portrayed when a person incorporates modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs into their daily clothing choices and how the perceptions formed around these phenomena may influence an individual's personal brand.

The above conceptual framework provides a good summary of not only this chapter, but also of the previous one and was very helpful in creating the interview structure and with the interpretation of results.

In the following chapter, the methodology that was used in the study is discussed.

# **CHAPTER FOUR**

## **METHODOLOGY**

## **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapters highlighted the introduction and background of the study, as well as the theoretical framework and literature review. A conceptual framework based on the theoretical foundation of the study and the literature review was created to facilitate the linking of aspects that were necessary to answer the research questions. In this chapter the focus is on the research design and methodology that were used in the execution of the study with the purpose of obtaining the aims and objectives of the study (Quinlan, 2011). The type of study, research paradigm, research approach and methodology, as well as the data collection method are explained and discussed. The analysis of the data and interpretation of the results are also provided.

## **4.2 RESEARCH PURPOSE**

As explained in Chapter 1, the purpose of the study was to explore the needs that are fulfilled by the use of modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs in personal brand building. Therefore, in-depth interviews were conducted with influencers who purposefully choose to use modernised Afrocentric fashion designs in their clothing choices to portray their personal brands. The aim was to gain insight into the motivations behind these choices. A further aim was to explore whether the use of these designs in personal brands, apart from being used for professional/commercial purposes, also fulfil personal or social needs. Personal brand identity, personal brand image and identity management in the creation of a personal brand were explored with the aim to gain an in-depth understanding of the relationship between modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs and establishing a personal brand.

#### **4.2.1 Research Question**

The study was conducted in order to obtain an answer to the following research question and sub-question:

##### **4.2.1.1 Research Question**

What are the motivations of a selection of 20-30 year old urban South Africans for purposefully choosing modernised Afrocentric fashion designs to establish and reinforce their personal brands?

##### **4.2.1.2 Research sub-question**

Apart from using personal brands for professional/commercial purposes, does the use of modernised Afrocentric fashion designs for personal brands also fulfil personal or social needs?

#### **4.3 TYPE OF RESEARCH**

##### **4.3.1 Basic Research**

The study can be classified as basic research. Basic research is also known as pure research and involves a researcher partaking in a particular study with the aim to gain more insight and understanding on the topic (Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). The implementation of modernised Afrocentric symbols and designs into one's fashion choices with the purpose of building a personal brand is a relatively new area of

academic exploration that has not been researched intensively. According to Kumar (2011), the purpose of basic research is to build on existing literature regarding a topic and to assist in the expansion of existing theories. The data gathered from this study may, therefore, add to the existing body of literature and may provide additional insight into the creation of personal branding. Since the aim of basic research is simply to expand on existing knowledge, basic research is not implemented for the purpose of invention (Bentley, Gulbrandsen & Kyvik, 2015), but with the purpose of developing a theory or to expand knowledge without having to consider a useful or generalisable result.

#### **4.3.2 Exploratory Research**

The study is also exploratory in nature. Exploratory research is concerned with understanding an unknown area and aims to obtain information about a topic that has not been researched before. The purpose of exploratory research is to provide more insight into unclear situations and sometimes to uncover potential business opportunities (Zikmund & Babin, 2007). Exploratory research is used when researchers want to obtain new insights, identify key concepts, confirm assumptions or familiarise themselves with unknown concepts, amongst others. Exploratory studies require flexible research designs to enhance understanding of unknown phenomena. Qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, case studies and surveys are employed in exploratory research (Zikmund & Babin, 2007; Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014).

Exploratory research provides insights and information for researchers to gain knowledge and more in-depth information which builds on their understanding of an unclear problem (Brown & Suter, 2011: 28). Therefore, exploratory research is often conducted when a research problem has not yet been clearly defined (Wild & Diggines, 2009). Researchers thus employ exploratory research with the purpose to gain insights

on a topic to enable them to decide whether there is a need for more intensive research to be conducted (Neelankavil, 2007).

A result of continuously evolving social systems is the continuous rise of new areas of research (Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). Currently, limited knowledge is available on the concept of Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs, its appropriation within the modern fashion industry, and the link to personal branding. The different ways in which modern fashion designs incorporate aspects of the phenomena were explored, as well as the reasons why individuals may choose to associate themselves with these symbols and designs in the building of their personal brands. Therefore, the findings of this study may provide more insight and add to already existing literature regarding this topic.

#### **4.4 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

A research paradigm is a set of assumptions or beliefs about fundamental aspects of reality which gives rise to a particular worldview (Maree, 2016). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), paradigms are representations of ideologies regarding the world that people hold internally and therefore human behaviour and actions are shaped by them. It is essential for researchers to consider paradigms as they provide a direction for formulating relevant research questions (Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014).

There are three dominant traditions in research, namely positivist, interpretivist and critical realist. The positivist approach encourages the use of the natural sciences to study objects. It recognises only results that can be scientifically verified, or which can be logically or mathematically proven. According to this approach, information derived from sensory experience, interpreted through reason and logic (empirical evidence), forms the exclusive source of all certain knowledge (Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). Interpretivism, on the other hand, arose due to the limitations of positivism and is based

on the foundation that human beings are consistently evolving as a result of their surroundings which influence their behaviour and perceptions (Deetz, 1996). The critical realism approach developed due to dissatisfaction with the non-humanistic approach of positivism and the passive and contextual views of interpretivism. Critical realism merges both the interpretivist and positivist approaches stating that people's experiences influence how they shape and perceive reality and that researchers need to expose unjust practices to free and empower people to build a better world (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012).

This study took an interpretive approach.

#### **4.4.1 Interpretive approach**

The interpretive approach is utilised in qualitative research and aims to explain phenomena as opposed to measuring it. This paradigm is based on the assumption that reality is a social construct which is created by the people acting in it. Within the Interpretivist approach, researchers are unable to separate themselves from the reality and they are actively involved in their research through methods such as interviews and focus groups (Hussey, 2009).

Interpretive researchers are of the belief that reality is based on a person's experience of their external world. The Interpretive approach does not focus on one specific theory, but rather considers its relevance and significance to the researcher, as well as those in the same field of research (Walsham, 1993). According to Myers (2009), reality is formed through an individual's social constructions which include shared meanings and language. Within the Interpretive approach, understanding is created based on the meanings that people have attached to experiences (Deetz, 1996). People may, therefore, choose to represent themselves through modernised Afrocentric fashion

symbols and designs as a means to connect with like-minded people who may share the same understanding based on past experiences, such as a shared cultural background.

The Interpretive approach considers that human beings are unique as they are consistently evolving based on their environment (Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). For example, Afrocentric fashion symbols were previously disregarded by the Western world as they were seen as primitive and therefore unattractive, but as the ideologies surrounding Africa as a continent shifted, people's perceptions have evolved to currently accepting and appreciating the garb. Although Afrocentric symbols may have remained the same, people's opinions regarding them have changed. Researchers who employ the Interpretive approach aim to gain an in-depth understanding of social behaviours through studying social interactions which, in this case, involves social interactions that may contribute to the building of personal brands by young urban South Africans who wear modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs. The Interpretive paradigm was chosen for this study because the aim was to understand how the use of modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs has encouraged individuals to incorporate this concept into their personal brands. In-depth interviews were conducted with eight young, urban South Africans who represent overt/active personal brands, and who use modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs to build their own personal brands.

The epistemological, axiological, and ontological positions of Interpretivism are as follows:

#### **4.4.1.1 Ontological position of Interpretivism**

Ontological considerations include people's beliefs about human existence and the nature of reality and incorporate questions of whether objective truth and reality can exist (Guba 1990; Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014; Finke & Gantz, 1996).

In the view of interpretivists, the experience of reality is perceived differently by human beings based on their own different circumstances and culture (Ponterotto, 2005). Individuals may, therefore, choose to incorporate Afrocentric fashion into their personal brands based on their upbringing and culture, which creates a deeper meaning and a sense of connection for them (Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). Human beings attach different meanings to their experiences and social interactions with others, therefore creating an individual sense of reality. They are influenced by their environments, which are constantly evolving as well (Thomas, 2010). The idea that human beings create their own constructs of the social world, which is in continuous change, applied to participants in this study who have continuous exposure to various trends on social media. They choose certain specific trends to incorporate into their daily lives and personalise these trends to reflect and represent themselves and their lifestyles (Ponterotto, 2005; Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014; Thomas, 2010). One of the aims of the interviews was to explore the participants' experience of clothing and the way that it reinforces their personalities.

Despite efforts to stay neutral, there is a possibility that the interpretation of the interview results and gained information could have been influenced by previous life experiences and constructions of reality.

#### **4.4.1.2 Epistemological position of Interpretivism**

An epistemological study is one which is concerned, from a philosophical point of view, with knowledge and the different ways of knowing (Horrigan, 2007). Interpretivists are of

the view that it is necessary to first understand what people view as common sense before their behaviour can be understood (Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). Therefore, researchers who approach their studies from an interpretivist basis, mostly use inductive methods by first gaining specific information and then interpreting it before attempting to formulate a theory (Ponterotto, 2005).

The interpretivist epistemological position was useful to gain more knowledge regarding the participants' subjective motivations for using modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs to build their personal brands.

#### **4.4.1.3 Axiological position of Interpretivism**

Since values guide all human behaviour, an axiological study focuses on an individual's values and the role these values play in the individual's understanding of reality (Ponterotto 2005; Du Plooy-Cilliers 2014). Interpretivists explore and focus on the complex understanding of unique realities and the emphasis is to distinctively discuss those values that shape the research, including both their own interpretations and those of participants (Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). In this study, proper consideration was given to the role that values could have played in interpreting the results.

### **4.5 RESEARCH APPROACH**

#### **4.5.1 Inductive study**

The main difference between inductive and deductive approaches to research is that whilst a deductive approach is aimed towards testing theory, an inductive approach is concerned with the generation of new theory emerging from the data (Hyde, 2000). In contrast with deductive reasoning, inductive reasoning moves from specific

observations to broader generalisations and theories. In inductive reasoning, we begin with specific observations and measures, begin to detect patterns and regularities, formulate some tentative categories that we can explore, and finally end up developing some general conclusions or theories (Hyde, 2000).

Inductive reasoning, by its very nature, is more open-ended and exploratory, especially at the beginning. Most social research involves both inductive and deductive reasoning processes at some time in the project (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). There is continuous cycling from theories down to observations and back up again to theories. Researchers may observe patterns in the data that lead them to develop new theories (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

In this study, the data collected through the interviews was analysed both inductively and deductively in order to formulate findings regarding the topic.

#### **4.5.2 Qualitative research**

Qualitative research is concerned with linguistic data as opposed to numerical data. The research is practised in natural settings where social interaction occurs and meaning-based methods are used for data analysis (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Nieuwenhuis (2016) defines qualitative research from a symbolic interactionist point of view and states that the main aim of qualitative research is to uncover questions regarding social contexts and the way that people interact within these settings through the use of symbols, rituals and social structures.

As stated above, qualitative research is employed when the study involves non-numerical data and the data source is in the form of text and words amongst

others. It aims to investigate the subjective experiences of individuals and the meaning that they attach to these experiences (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Data was collected by analysing the participants' experiences in order to understand how these individuals construct meaning and perceptions within a social setting. Qualitative research is a continuous and cumulative process and it is essential that the most relevant data collection tools are employed to answer the research questions.

Qualitative research is mainly concerned with observing and understanding the reasoning behind people's behaviour and perceptions regarding a specific phenomenon (De Beer, 1993). It takes on an interpretive approach as results are based on the generation of data according to the interpretation of information by the researcher. Qualitative research was employed in this study because it explored the opinions and perceptions of individuals regarding their choices to incorporate modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs into their personal brands (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The flexibility and more casual approach offered by a qualitative design was well-suited to the study.

According to Golafashani (2003), qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that investigates phenomena in context-specific settings. Hoepfl (1997:4) states that "where quantitative researchers seek causal determination, prediction and generalisation of findings, qualitative researchers seek understanding and insight into phenomena about which little is known". Qualitative research methods were suitable for this study because they enabled the attainment of rich comprehensive data that could be used to generate the desired information. It was thus used to broaden understanding, expand knowledge, clarify issues, identify behaviours, seek motivations and provide input for future research and development where variables that were identified might be tested quantitatively (Du Plooy, 2008: 83). Qualitative research enables flexibility in data

collection, analysis and interpretation and this results in an in-depth understanding of abstract phenomena (Du Plooy, 2008).

## **4.6 METHODOLOGY USED**

Methodology refers to procedures for gathering data and incorporates the relationships between method and theory (Wagner, Kawulich & Garner, 2012; Flick, 2018). As Kaplan (1964) explains, methodology also refers to the description and justification of methods in order to help explain the process of research.

### **4.6.1 Unit of analysis**

According to Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., (2014: 53), the unit of analysis can be defined as all the members or elements of the population. Babbie (2010: 94-121) states that the unit of analysis is crucial in data analysis as it defines “the what or whom” being studied, which can consist of individuals, cases and social artefacts with elements that can be observed, described or explained by researchers (Gray, 2007; Babbie, 2009). For this study, the unit of analysis was individuals and data was gathered by means of in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight young, urban South Africans who represent active/overt personal brands, and who use modernised Afrocentric fashion designs to build their own personal brands. The selection criteria that were used are explained in section 4.6.3 below.

### **4.6.2 Population**

In research, a population comprises any well-defined set of elements, it is important to note that with a population, all its elements can be listed to create a sampling frame

(Adams, Khan and Raeside, 2011). A population is inclusive of all units or objects that exhibit characteristics the researcher wishes to explore (Keyton, 2011). The target population for this study comprised all South African individuals who incorporate modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs into their daily clothing choices in order to build their personal brands. In other words, all South Africans who overtly identify their personal brands through using modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and motifs in their daily clothing choices.

#### **4.6.3 Sampling**

According to Cooper and Schindler (2011), a sample refers to a fragment of the population. It consists of a portion of respondents who have been carefully chosen by the researcher out of the larger group (Neuman, 2014). Since it was impracticable to interview all South Africans that fulfil the above-mentioned requirements, for the purpose of this study a sample of eight 20-30 year old urban South Africans who fulfilled the following selection criteria were chosen:

- They had to purposefully choose consistent use of modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs to build their own personal brands;
- They had to maintain a regular interpersonal social presence;
- They had to have active social media pages on which they posted content regularly, with a substantial number of followers with whom they regularly engage; and
- Most of their posted content had to be directly linked to modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs;

The findings and conclusions that are obtained from a sample are applied to obtain a deeper insight into the population and to facilitate context, meaning and understanding

(Bryman & Bell, 2011). The two main types of sampling in research are probability and non-probability sampling, which are summarised below:

- **Probability sampling** involves random selection, which ensures that each sample unit has an equal probability of being chosen and each element of the population has a known non-zero probability of selection (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). With probability sampling, each unit present in the population has an equal chance of being selected to participate in the sample (Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014).
- **Non-probability sampling** is usually employed in instances where the researcher is unable to use the entire population because of the difficulty to determine who they are (Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). Rather than randomisation, non-probability sampling takes into account the judgment of the researcher and participants are selected based on the ease with which they can be accessed. Not all members of the population have a chance of being selected (Showkat & Parveen, 2017).

For the purpose of this study, a non-probability sampling technique was employed. There are four types of non-probability sampling methods: convenience sampling, quota sampling, snowball sampling and purposive sampling, which are briefly discussed below.

- **Convenient sampling** is unrestricted and the most cost-effective and easiest to conduct, consisting of respondents whom the researcher can reach easily and conveniently. This sample could, for example, include pedestrians on the streets and followers of a brand's Instagram page (Saunders, et al., 2012)

- **Quota sampling** enables researchers to improve the representativeness of their studies (Adams, et al., 2011). Quota sampling works on the basis that a specific set of characteristics determine the dimensions of the population, with researchers specifying more than one control dimension. It is essential for researchers to control certain characteristics, such as age and gender, to draw a representative sample of the population (Adams, et al., 2011). It involves the researcher selecting a sample based on a quota specified for the sub-groups of the given population (Saunders, et al., 2012)
- **Snowball sampling** is a technique used by researchers when the anticipated population is difficult to locate as it may be small and not at the researchers' disposal. The researcher finds one subject who is well-aligned to the study and requests that person to identify similar subjects to participate in the study (Quinlan, 2011).
- **Purposive sampling** consists of respondents who are chosen by the researcher, based on the researcher's judgment that they will fulfill the basic requirements of the study. The respondents are specifically chosen because they serve a certain purpose (Leedy & Omrod, 2014).

In this study, a non-probability snowball sampling technique was used. According to Adams, et al., (2011), the snowball sampling method can be employed when participants/respondents are difficult to identify and are more easily located via a referral. Snowball sampling is beneficial when small sample sizes are investigated and it is also cost-effective. The results from a snowball sampling technique cannot, however, be generalised to the general population. The research aim of this study was an increase in knowledge and understanding of a specific aspect of society and not to generate data that can be broadly applied or used to solve a problem. As explained above, in using this sampling technique researchers identify one participant who fulfils

the parameters and characteristics of their study and requests that respondent to identify another similar participant who will be willing to participate in the study and so on until the desired sample size is reached (Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). In this study, one young urban South African who uses modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs to build his/her own personal brand was identified, interviewed and requested to identify one or more similar people who could be approached to participate in the study. With each identified participant, this process was repeated. Participation was on a voluntary basis. This sampling method saved time, enhanced accuracy of results and ensured that all the data collected for the research was relevant. A more detailed description of the participants will be provided in Chapter 5.

## **4.7 DATA COLLECTION METHOD**

As stated by various authors (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Quinlan, 2011), data collection involves gathering information that can be analysed to draw conclusions. For the purpose of this study, secondary and primary data sources were utilised.

### **4.7.1 Secondary data sources**

Secondary data can be defined as information gathered by individuals or institutions other than the researcher (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005). It includes, but is not limited to published journals, books, and online sources (Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). It consists of the existing literature available on a particular research topic (Quinlan, 2011). For the literature review and theoretical foundation of this study secondary data sources were utilised. Journal articles, magazines, online sources and books were used to gain an understanding of -

- the use of modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs and their possible role in personal branding; and to assess
- what research has already been conducted on the subject.

Secondary data was thus mostly used to access data that already existed on the study topic, while primary data was gathered during the interviews (Smith, 2010; David & Sutton, 2011).

#### **4.7.2 Primary data sources**

Primary data refers to original information collected by researchers for the purpose of their studies (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005). Primary sources consist of interviews, eyewitness accounts, as well as other data gathered to answer the research question (Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014). All data collected by a researcher when investigating a specific study is primary data (Quinlan, 2011). The current study employed in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended, face-to-face interviews with eight participants.

#### **4.7.3 Interviews**

Open-ended interviews require interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee where they establish an understanding or rapport resulting in the interviewee openly sharing and discussing his or her opinions with the interviewer. The latter must be very flexible in listening and interpreting the information without bias (Noaks & Wincup, 2004; Silverman, 2014; Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). Open-ended interviews should focus on the broader purpose of the study and take into consideration various aspects, such as the differences in language and culture of participants (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Open-ended interviews were used in this study because it facilitated the capturing of the experiences and understanding of the participants' reality regarding their choices to

incorporate modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs into their personal brands (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014; Burr, 2015). It also enabled the participants to engage in dialogue with the interviewer for the construction of shared meaning surrounding the phenomenon (Silverman, 2014). As quoted by Atkinson and Coffey (2002: 120) “Interviews become equally valid ways of capturing shared cultural understandings and enactments of the social world.” Face-to-face interviews generated more conversational data as opposed to written responses, thus it resulted in more detailed and in-depth information that was useful in this study. Nonverbal aspects were noted and additional questions were asked if and when necessary to reach an understanding and rapport with interviewees (Bertram & Christansen, 2014; Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014).

According to Bertram & Christansen (2014), interviews may pose a disadvantage in research as participants may provide inaccurate responses which may have been influenced by external variables during the interview process. This risk was combated by the interviewer’s genuine interest in Afrocentric fashion symbols, which enabled her to relate to the participants as opposed to being seen by them as a threat or creating a feeling of being judged. Given the previous negative attitudes and connotations surrounding Afrocentric fashion symbols, it was necessary for the interviewer to establish this rapport with the interviewees to ensure them that they were not being judged or ridiculed for choosing to use modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols to build their personal brands. Additionally, interviews may sometimes result in copious information which can be difficult and time-consuming to analyse (Bertram & Christansen, 2014). Therefore, a detailed data analysis and interpretation plan was adhered to. Since interviews entail self-reported data, it can result in inefficiencies and inconsistencies (Bertram & Christansen, 2014). In this study, the self-reported data was considered as genuine opinions and not as incorrect data capturing.

All the participants were presented with an introductory letter (see Appendix A), which informed them about the background and methodology of the study and that the interviews will be recorded for ease of transcription and to ensure the accuracy of the results. They also received consent forms which they were required to complete prior to the study, reflecting their willingness to participate (see Appendix B). They were given the opportunity to opt-out of the study at any given time without facing any repercussions. The interviews were conducted in person at a time that best suited the participants, and in an environment where they felt at ease. There was no intervention in or influencing of the participants' responses (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014).

The interviews lasted on average for an hour, they were scheduled to suit all parties and were digitally recorded for transcription purposes. In addition, careful and reflective notes were taken by the interviewer. Aspects such as nonverbal cues (facial expressions and body language) were noted, as well as insights that occurred during the interviews (Groenewald, 2008). These memoing notes were indicated between brackets in the right margin of the transcriptions and labeled as either nonverbal notes or insights. Memoing was incorporated throughout the study to record insights gained from the participants' responses regarding the motivations behind their choices to incorporate modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs into their personal brands. Memoing is beneficial as it forms a synthesis of information derived from nonverbal cues, the sudden insights that occurred during the interviews and the interpretation of transcriptions. This facilitates additional insight that can usually not be derived from audio recordings only (Cresswell, 2011). Memoing, therefore, equips researchers with additional or even alternative information that could have been overlooked while focusing on conducting the interviews (Cresswell, 2011).

The in-depth interviews provided an opportunity for the participants to express themselves verbally in order to explain the significance and reasoning behind their clothing choices in establishing their personal brands.

#### **4.7.3 Interview structure**

The interview structure was inspired by the theoretical foundation and literature review and the questions covered a number of key topics. The questions explored why the participants choose to interact with modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs; the significance of the latter to them; whether they were aware of the symbolic values attached to the ethnic symbols used in modern fashion designs; and whether they purposefully use these symbols and designs to build their personal brands (complete interview structure attached as Appendix C).

During the interviews, the interview structure's open-ended questions were followed, but participants were encouraged to openly share their views and opinions in order to create conversation between the interviewer and the participants regarding their use of modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs (Flick, 2011; Bertram and Christansen, 2014; Creswell, 2017).

The researcher conducted, recorded and transcribed all the interviews personally because in effect, she was the research instrument and her contributions towards the context of the study and interview process were crucial (Patton, 2002).

### **4.8 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION METHOD**

Data analysis is concerned with the structuring of data sets, categorising the information into sections, grouping the data, identifying patterns, pinpointing critical information and discussing the findings (Lawrence & Tar, 2013). The data analysis process follows three steps:

- **Data reduction**, which is concerned with the formulation of codes and categories from data sets, identifying patterns and making connections within this information (Saldaña, 2013).
- **Data presentation**, which is concerned with the structuring of data retrieved from the interviews and which entails explanations and direct quotes or memoing notes, enabling an interviewer to draw conclusions; and
- **Drawing conclusions**, which enables a researcher to summarise and report on the findings obtained from the data set (Saldaña, 2013).

The method of thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in the data which facilitated data interpretation and the creation of meaning regarding the motivations for choosing modernised Afrocentric fashion designs to build personal brands. It was also used to explore whether there is a relationship between using modernised Afrocentric designs for personal brand building and the fulfillment of other personal and social needs.

#### **4.8.1 Thematic analysis**

Thematic analysis involves the identification, analysis and reporting of patterns in texts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is a means of data reduction through the identification of themes (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Thematic analysis entails systematically identifying

similar aspects from the information gathered and grouping it into categories in order to create and attach meanings to the data (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2002). The data gained from the transcriptions was thus organised into more manageable units by scrutinising it for relevant aspects. It was interpreted in terms of relationships, similarities and differences. Basic ideas or categories were identified, from which themes emerged (Maree, 2007; Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014). The categories were developed deductively in the sense that existing theories and previously conducted research studies were used to assist interpretation. Simultaneously, the themes were inductively based on the patterns that emerged from the data. Categories and themes were defined to ensure mutual exclusivity of the categories and to ensure consistent application to the text during the analysis and interpretation processes.

Thematic analysis is advantageous to researchers as it enables the reduction and presentation of large data sets and provides them with a certain level of flexibility during the process through which they identify what the important emerging and recurring themes from the data are (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic research, however, also has its disadvantages. Atkinson (1992) states that it does not take into consideration uncategorised data. Silverman (2014) asserts that researchers sometimes use their own everyday knowledge in phrasing and applying categories. These risks were avoided through incorporating inductive and deductive coding in a repetitive process; utilising a second coder to validate the trustworthiness of the findings; and thoroughly scrutinising the transcribed information numerous times in order to place information into categories based on the reasons why the eight participants in the study chose to portray their personal brands through the use of modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs. The data reduction procedures that were followed and the findings are discussed in Chapter 5.

## **4.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

An ethical study is one which takes into consideration “principles of conduct that are acceptable” (Mauther, 2002:1). The ethical considerations considered in this study are discussed in more detail below.

### **4.9.1 Trustworthiness**

Since qualitative studies are subjective in nature - it is impossible to obtain the same result twice as results are unique to participant experience (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). This has resulted in researchers steering away from using the terms ‘validity’ and ‘reliability’ in qualitative studies and using the term ‘trustworthiness’ instead (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Koonin, 2014).

Within the interpretivist paradigm, it is crucial that an interviewer provides elaborate descriptions of the data which portrays accurate occurrences in the participants lives. It is essential for a researcher to provide a detailed account of how the information was analysed in order to reach a final conclusion. The researcher must take into account that there may be multiple repetitions of the study and results may be subjected to various interpretations and conclusions. The results of the study cannot be generalised to the population and are only representative of the participants in the study. The subjectivity of the researcher in the study must be acknowledged (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). All these guidelines were followed in this study.

Trustworthiness is derived from four categories, namely credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability, which are explained in more detail below (Geertz, 1973; Koonin, 2014; Shenton, 2004).

#### **4.9.2 Credibility**

Credibility in research is concerned with the accuracy with which the researcher interprets the data gathered from the participants (Koonin, 2014). The more time a researcher spends with the participants, the higher the credibility of the study will be because it will lead to a deeper understanding of the participants. In this study the personal contexts of the participants, as well as the broader context relating to Afrocentric symbols and fashions were taken into consideration (Shenton, 2004; Koonin, 2014: 258).

In the end, the credibility of a study relies on the accuracy of the interpretation of the data gathered from the research. The concepts used in the study were thoroughly explained to ensure that precise meanings were understood (Koonin, 2014).

#### **4.9.3 Transferability**

Transferability entails that the findings and results of a specific study can be used for a similar study and yield similar results. The results and analysis from the study should be able to be applied to similar research topics (Shenton, 2004; Koonin, 2014). For this study, the methodology was described in great detail to ensure that if researchers in the future conduct similar studies, they will have a step-by-step guide for replicating the study.

#### **4.9.4 Dependability**

Dependability is difficult to achieve because of the emphasis placed on the context in qualitative research. It entails conducting research that is replicable and is concerned with the process of integration between the data collection method, data analysis method and the findings (Shenton, 2004; Koonin, 2014). For a study to be replicable, it must provide an audit trail which “attests to the accuracy of translations of information from various data sources and provides the means for ensuring the confirmability of the findings, allowing for reconstruction of events and processes that led to the conclusions in the research” (Wagner, et al., 2012: 243). This study provides a detailed description of the methodology that was followed in order to ensure ease of replication.

#### **4.9.5 Confirmability**

Confirmability in qualitative research refers to how well the information was gathered and how well the interpretation thereof supports the results of the study. It must be evident that the findings are a reflection of the participants’ real-life experiences as opposed to experiences as subjectively created by the researcher (Wagner, et al., 2012; Koonin, 2014). Confirmability is concerned with the depth in which the research process has been explained in order to assist others in analysing the research design (Shenton, 2004; Koonin, 2014). For this study, confirmability was obtained by ensuring that the findings were derived from a combination of solid primary and secondary research.

#### **4.9.6 Ethics clearance**

The following steps were taken to ensure the ethical protection of research participants in this study.

The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the Independent Institute of Education’s

Postgraduate Review Committee before engaging in primary research (Appendix E). Following approval from the Board, the introductory letters (Appendix A) were sent to all participants who had agreed to partake in the study, which clearly stated the background, intention, nature and ethical measures of the study. As already mentioned, the participants were also requested to sign a letter of consent (Appendix B) to confirm their willingness to participate in the interviews. The researcher ensured confidentiality of the participants through protecting their identities. No names were linked to the transcriptions of the interviews and participants were referred to by numbers, which ensured the protection of all possible sensitive data in the study (Flick, 2011). As explained above, the participants were informed that all participation was voluntary and that they have the option to opt-out (with no repercussions) at any point should they feel uncomfortable (Silverman, 2014). The participants were assured that no physical or emotional stress will be suffered as a result of their participation (Fisher, 2007; Silverman, 2014). They were also provided with the contact details of an intermediary should they feel that the study was unethical or went against any of the ethics stipulated at the onset of the interviews. Complete transparency and honesty were maintained throughout the study and there were no monetary or other forms of compensation offered to the participants (Louw, 2014). The participants were also offered access to their transcriptions after the interviews, as well as access to the study upon completion. Additional ethical considerations included that all data sources were properly referenced in order to avoid misleading findings and information.

The data collected during the study is stored on a password-protected computer and hard copy data in a storeroom on the Vega campus for a period of five years. After this time, hard copy data will be shredded, and electronic data will be deleted.

#### **4.10 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER**

Chapter 4 described the methodology used to answer the research questions. The first question was what the motivations of a selection of 20-30 year old urban South Africans are for purposefully choosing modernised Afrocentric fashion designs to establish and reinforce their personal brands. The sub-question was whether the use of modernised Afrocentric fashion designs in personal brands, apart from professional/commercial uses, also fulfil personal and social needs. The study adopted the interpretivist paradigm and thus qualitative research was used. The data was gathered personally during in-depth interviews, and an interview structure was used, which contained a number of open-ended questions. The interviews were scheduled to suit the participants and the interviewer. They were between the ages of 20-30 and represented active/overt personal brands that incorporate modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs. The participants were identified through the snowball sampling method in order to enable data gathering that was relevant for the study. The method of thematic analysis, which was used to analyse the data, was explained. Finally, ethical considerations pertinent to the study were also described.

In the following chapter, the focus is on explaining in detail the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data retrieved from the interviews.

# **CHAPTER FIVE**

## **DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter explained the research design and methodology that were used for this study. In this chapter, the focus is on the collection of the data and the analysis and interpretation thereof with the aim of answering the research questions.

According to Antonius (2003: 2), data consists of information collected in a systematic manner and structured in a way that enables the reader to interpret the information correctly. It is open to reconfiguration and reinterpretation and numerous perceptions may be analysed in order to arrive at a conclusion regarding the research question (Schostak & Schostak, 2008:10). The data collection process that was followed in this study focused on gathering information from all the relevant data sources with the main aim of answering the research questions. Data collection methods fall under two categories, namely secondary methods of collecting data and primary methods of collecting data. This study utilised both - primary data collection methods in the form of in-depth semi-structured interviews and secondary data sources, such as journals, books and online sources (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014).

During the data analysis process the data was re-arranged and broken down into smaller sections, which were then arranged to identify key sections of the data to seek patterns, and then to report on the findings (Lawrence & Tar, 2013). A thematic analysis was conducted, which is a method used to identify, explore, analyse and report on the themes or patterns that were identified in the data (Braun & Clarke 2006: 79).

During the data interpretation process that was followed, the data was reviewed more than once in order to attain an informed conclusion. During this interpretation, meaning

was assigned to the information, which added significance to the data set. Interpretation of data is crucial in research as it creates meaning and insight, and therefore proper interpretation is crucial to achieve efficient and accurate results (Lebied, 2018).

## **5.2 DATA COLLECTION**

Throughout the month of October 2018, the in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with eight participants in Cape Town, South Africa, after they were provided with an explanatory statement (Appendix A) and after they had signed consent forms (Appendix B). As explained in Chapter 4, the participants were chosen according to the following selection criteria:

- They had to purposefully choose consistent use of modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs to build their own personal brands;
- They had to maintain a regular interpersonal social presence;
- They had to have active social media pages on which they posted content regularly, with a substantial number of followers with whom they regularly engage; and
- Most of their posted content had to be directly linked to modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs.

Of the eight participants, five were female and three were male. All the participants had spent most of their adult lives in South Africa. Seven participants were black, one participant was white. All of them were entrepreneurs and active in areas such as Afrocentric fashion design, sourcing and selling of Afrocentric fabrics, etc. To ensure the anonymity of the participants, they are referred to as Participant 1, 2, 3 and so forth.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the interviews were scheduled to suit all parties and were digitally recorded for transcription purposes. In addition, careful and reflective notes were taken by the interviewer, which included observations of nonverbal behaviour or cues, such as facial expressions and body language, as well as sudden insights that occurred to the interviewer during the interviews (indicated in the right margin of the transcriptions between brackets and labeled as either nonverbal notes or memoing).

Memoing was incorporated throughout the study to record insights gained from the participants' responses regarding the reasons why they choose to incorporate modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs into their personal brands. Memoing is beneficial as it forms a synthesis of information derived from nonverbal cues and the sudden insights that occurred during the interviews and the interpretation of transcriptions. This facilitated additional insight into the study that could not be derived from the audio recordings only (Cresswell, 2011). The memoing provided additional or even alternative information that could have been overlooked while the focus was on conducting the interviews (Cresswell, 2011).

The face-to-face interviews provided an opportunity for the participants to explain the significance and motivations behind their clothing choices in establishing their personal brands, as well as fulfilling other personal and social needs. The interviews were transcribed into written text by the interviewer personally in order to ensure completeness and trustworthiness.

### **5.3 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

The aim of qualitative data analysis and interpretation is to deductively, through a coding process (based on a theoretical foundation and conceptual framework), manage,

categorise and describe data in terms of emerging themes (Saldana, 2009; Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014)

### **5.3.1 Coding and Interpreting the Data**

Qualitative research is often problematic because it is done mainly with words/sentences and not with numbers as in quantitative research. Words have multiple meanings which sometimes complicates analysis and interpretation but may ultimately render more meanings than a set of numbers. In qualitative research, the solution is often to convert words or sentences to symbols/numbers but to retain the words and use these together with the numbers/symbols throughout the analysis (Welman, 2005: 213). In this study, it was decided not to use symbols/numbers, but rather to retain the actual words or short phrases identified during the analysis (Saldana, 2009: 3).

A code is the smallest component of material that can be analysed. The purpose of coding is to analyse and make sense of the data collected. Codes are tags or labels that attach meaning to raw notes. These labels are used to retrieve and organise chunks of text in order to categorise it according to particular themes (Welman, 2005: 214). According to Saldana (2009: 3), a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute to a portion of language-based or visual data, derived inter alia from interview transcripts. The portion of data to be coded during First Cycle coding processes can range in magnitude from a single word to a full sentence or an entire page of text. In Second Cycle coding processes, the portions coded can be the exact same units, longer passages of texts and even a reconfiguration of the codes themselves developed at that stage. Just as a title represents and captures a book or film or a poem's primary content and essence, so does a code represent and capture a datum's primary content and essence.

Lopez (2013: 2) states that the process of data analysis entails using both deductive and inductive reasoning which are defined as methods used to move between data and theory. While deduction involves shifting from theory to data, induction is concerned with shifting from data to theory. Both methods were used in this study, drawing from the literature review and theoretical framework, as well as from the aspects that materialised from the data.

In this study, the transcriptions were studied intensively in order to find relevant aspects. The codes that were developed deductively, were based on concepts found in the relevant theories and in the literature review in order to facilitate insight into the use of modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs to build personal brands. The codes that were developed inductively were based on relationships, similarities and differences in how the participants described their motivations for making use of modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs. Consistency of the coding was rechecked by a second coder to ensure the trustworthiness of data (Strydom and Bezuidenhout, 2014).

In this study, the transcriptions were coded by making use of open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Babbie, 2010: 401; Saldana, 2016: 4). In the first phase of the coding cycle, **Open Coding** was used during which the data was separated, critically analysed and compared for likenesses and differences (Babbie, 2010: 401; Saldana, 2016: 4). This method of coding is used as a logical starting point for the analysis of the data. Some of the codes that were identified were descriptive codes (Welman, 2005: 214) that needed little interpretation and only involved attributing a part of the data to a topic/category. **Descriptive Coding** is a way to analyse the data's basic topics (not content) and to develop a basic vocabulary to form categories for further analytic work (Saldana, 2009: 71). Simple observation was used to determine in which context the

words were used in order to understand the specific topic/concept in the transcription. To understand the correct meaning is important in order to avoid misinterpretation. Similar quotes were sorted according to the topics/categories that emerged (Welman, et al., 2005: 212). The Open Coding process incorporated **Structural Coding**, which applies a content-based or conceptual phrase representing a topic of inquiry to a segment of data that relates to a specific research question used to frame the interview (Saldana, 2016: 66). **In vivo Coding**, which refers to a word or a short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative transcriptions (Saldana, 2016:74) was also used.

In the second phase of the coding process, **Axial Coding** was applied to the data, where the data that was split during open coding, was sorted and re-labeled into similar, but fewer and denser conceptual categories. Grouping similarly coded data reduced the number of codes that were identified during Open Coding by sorting and relabeling them into conceptual categories (Saldana 2009; Babbie 2010).

The final act of coding is termed **Selective Coding** and during this process, the main theme of the study was identified which incorporated and related to all the other themes identified within the study (Saldana, 2009; Babbie, 2010). Saldana (2009:164) refers to selective coding as theoretical coding which he explains as an umbrella that covers and accounts for all other codes and categories formulated at that stage in the analysis. During selective coding, the main theme of a study is identified by isolating a code which is related to each of the codes formed during axial coding.

During analysis, the researcher placed the codes to the left of the verbatim text and close to the concept they describe.

### 5.3.2 Thematic Analysis

Like coding, thematic analysis or the search for themes in the data is part of the research design that includes the primary questions, goals, conceptual framework, and literature review (Saldana, 2009: 140). Theme identification is thus one of the most fundamental tasks in qualitative research and is especially applicable to interviews (Saldana, 2009: 141). Themes can be described as “umbrella” constructs or categories which are usually identified after or during the data collection process (Welman, et al., 2005: 211), in this case, by reviewing, analysing and interpreting the original transcriptions of the interviews.

During analysis and interpretation, themes emerged from identified categories (Saldana, 2009: 11). “A category is a word or phrase describing some segment of the data that is explicit, whereas a theme is a phrase or sentence describing more subtle, tacit or abstract processes, for example, SECURITY can be a code, but A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY can be a theme” (Saldana, 2009: 11). Saldana (2009: 139) describes a theme as “a phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means. The term *theme* is often used interchangeably with the term *category*”. Saldana (2009:139) defines a theme “as an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent pattern and its different manifestations, capturing it into a meaningful whole. A theme thus categorises a set of data into an implicit topic that organises a group of repeating ideas. Themes can be statements presented by participants during interviews, or conceptual topics developed by the researcher during a review of the data. A theme can, for example, describe a certain behaviour within a culture” (Saldana, 2009: 139).

Morse and Field (1995: 139) also state that thematic analysis entails the exploration and identification of prevailing themes identified by researchers as they scrutinise the data. By definition, thematic analysis is a method employed by researchers in order to

identify, analyse and report on the themes and patterns that have been identified in a given set of data (Braun & Clarke 2006: 79). Thematic analysis is therefore concerned with the process of coding, the identification of categories and ultimately with the formulating of themes that may lead to the creation of meaning/theory. This process is visually explained by Saldana (2009) as follows:

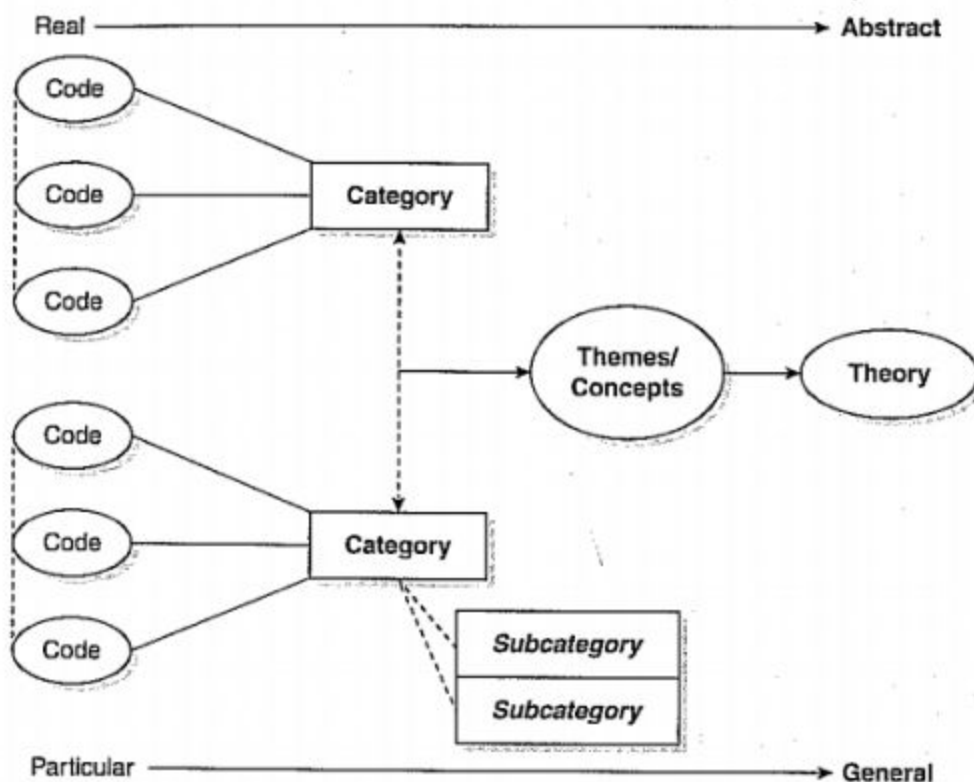


Figure 16: A streamlined codes-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry. (Saldana, 2009:12).

Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight the advantages of using thematic analysis in research stating that it is flexible and enables the generation of rich and detailed information. Other authors, such as Altawil and Nel (2008: 28) support this, highlighting the effectiveness of thematic analysis as it is easy and quick to grasp, therefore enabling less qualified researchers to conduct qualitative research. He additionally points out that thematic content analysis is suitable where a study requires the

researcher to summarise large sets of data, it also enables social interpretations of data and provides an ease in identifying similarities and differences in data.

In this study, the transcriptions of the interviews (which included notes about observations of nonverbal clues, as well as reflective memoing) were scrutinised in order to identify relevant ideas in the data that pointed to broad categories that would facilitate the interpretation of the data and ultimately lead to the identification of themes and the creation of meaning. The aim of this process was to explore why young urban South Africans use modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs to build their personal brands.

In order to formulate themes, the different codes that were identified during the coding process (deducted from theories and existing literature and inducted from the primary data) were thoroughly reviewed. This was guided by the research problem and questions in the interview structure (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014). Each theme/category was clearly defined by either words or a phrase to ensure consistency when the data was interpreted.

Four categories were identified in this study, namely Identity, Pride, Language, Unity and Language. From these categories the following themes emerged:

**1. Identity**

- a. Africanism
- b. Self-expression

**2. Pride**

- a. Celebration
- b. Beauty

### 3. Language

- a. Communication
- b. Meaning of cultural symbols

### 4. Unity

- a. Social Inclusion
- b. Advancement of Africanism

Table 1 below provides a visual presentation of identified categories, themes and codes.

| Category | Theme           | Codes                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Identity | Self-expression | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Africanness</li><li>• Afrocentric symbols</li><li>• Clothing</li><li>• Representation of oneself</li></ul>                                                                                |
|          | Africanism      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Africanness</li><li>• Identifier</li><li>• Culture</li><li>• Upbringing</li></ul>                                                                                                         |
| Pride    | Celebration     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Africanness</li><li>• African ideals and excellence</li><li>• Celebration of origin and traditions</li><li>• Acknowledgement and celebration</li><li>• Pictures on social media</li></ul> |
|          | Beauty          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Colours of fabric</li><li>• Vibrancy of prints</li><li>• Diversity of African cultures</li></ul>                                                                                          |

|          |                             |                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|          |                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appeal of African cultures</li> </ul>                                                                                  |
| Language | Communication               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nonverbal cues</li> <li>• Proclamation of values and beliefs</li> </ul>                                                |
|          | Meaning of cultural symbols | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tradition</li> <li>• Significance</li> <li>• Signification</li> </ul>                                                  |
| Unity    | Social Inclusion            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Representing Africa</li> <li>• Attachment to African culture</li> <li>• Identifying like-minded individuals</li> </ul> |
|          | Advancement of Africanism   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perception of Africa</li> <li>• Sense of control/power</li> </ul>                                                      |

Table 1: Identified categories, themes and codes for this study.

The frequencies that categories were mentioned were integrated into class intervals on a four-point scale (Table 2, available in Appendix E) in order to determine the importance of the categories and therefore the order in which they are discussed (Welman, 2005: 217). The following order of discussion is used: Identity, Pride, Language and Unity.

The categories and codes were used to explore the data gained from the interviews. Identified codes, categories and emerging themes determined which elements of the interviews were selected and summarised for interpretation.

## 5.4 RESULTS FROM INTERPRETATION AND RELEVANCE FOR ACHIEVING RESEARCH AIM

This section is discussed according to the categories and themes (Table 1 above) that emerged during the interpretation of the transcriptions, with the aim to arrive at an answer to the research questions of the study.

### 5.4.1. IDENTITY

The participants pointed out that they incorporate modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs into their clothing choices because it forms a part of them and their **identity**. Identity refers to a set of characteristics that make individuals who they are (Hornby & Turnbull, 2010). **Africanism** and **Self-expression** emerged as themes under this category.

#### 5.4.1.1 Africanism

The term *Africanism* can be defined as characteristics of the African culture that can be traced through societal practices and institutions of the African diaspora (Sandile, 2015). Throughout history, the dispersed descendants of African people have displayed many forms of cultural retention of their African ancestry. Afrocentric fashion symbols are specific to the African continent and for years have been recognised as identifiers of the African people (Rovine, 2013).

Throughout the study, participants highlighted how Afrocentric fashions enabled them to address Africanism. Participant 8 expressed it as follows: *“It (Afrocentric fashion) holds a strong heritage because it expresses where we came from because back in the day, it identified us as Africans”*. Participant 6 supported this statement and expanded: *“It (Afrocentric fashion) should be attributed to us Africans, we should also be identified as the source. We should have that point of reference as Africans - ‘this is from this culture in Africa, this is what it signifies’ - so that people are being made aware of that culture”*. Although the participants seem to live a very Westernised lifestyle where they adopt technologies and ways of life that differ from their traditions and the lifestyles of their parents and grandparents, they endeavor to maintain their African identity through avenues that they are able to control, one of which is their clothing choices (Patrick, 2005). Participant 1 was of the opinion that: *“You have to embrace your Africanness however possible, there are so many Western influences that we have embraced, like our phones, with things that I can control, such as my clothes, I keep it African”*. The participants are making deliberate efforts to ensure that no matter where they are, they are promoting and carrying a part of their heritage with them. Participant 2 stated: *“In places where I know that there isn’t an African presence or celebration of Africanness, I want to take my Africanness to that place, so I know I’ll look different, but I’ll be doing it deliberately to celebrate and bring recognition to my Africanness and show my pride in it”*. The participants are adamant to incorporate modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs into their daily wear because they believe and want to share with observers that this is who they are and that they are willingly standing by it. *“It is who I am,”* participant 7 stated. According to the participants, although modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs are only gaining popularity in recent times (Austin, 2012), they are here to stay due to the intrinsic meaning they bear for those who identify with them (McLeod, 2014): *“Afrocentric fashion can never be a fad because it is who we are”* (Participant 7).

Most of the participants were exposed to Afrocentric fashion garments growing up

(except for participant 6, who was more exposed to Westernised styles) and they proclaimed wearing Afrocentric clothing to special events, such as weddings and Heritage Day at school. These statements are in accordance with Rabine (2002), who highlights the use of Afrocentric fashion symbols to symbolise cultural and traditional ties. Participant 1, however, mentioned that although he encountered Afrocentric fashion symbols growing up, they were not as accessible as they are now - they were reserved for a select few: *"Yes, I was (exposed), but it was reserved for the privileged who could afford it, back in the day, Afrocentric fabric was pricey and only a few could afford the extra effort to have the fabric tailored for them, the rest of us wished we could have it, but we couldn't"*. The participants were taught from a young age, mostly by their mothers, that Afrocentric fashion symbols were representative of their culture and intrinsic to their being, participant 3 said: *"It's really integral to my identity, it's my differentiator"* and participant 7 echoed this: *"I wear Afrocentric fashion symbols because they speak to me"*. According to the participants, there is a deep-rooted significance attached to the concept of Afrocentric fashion symbols (McLeod, 2014). The participants are very involved in the process of creating the fashion items that they choose to associate with as these items enable them to stand out from the crowd and establish themselves in the world: *"We wear local and choose Africa in our dress - it's like a reclaim on our identity"* (Participant 1). As discussed by Patrick (2005), Africans in Westernised countries have adopted Afrocentric fashion symbols into their daily wear to show their association with Africa and as a form of nostalgia. It is thus clear that within an African context, we live in a time that has greatly been influenced by Western ideals, but young South Africans with active/overt personal brands, incorporate modernised Afrocentric fashions into their personal brands because they place great importance on showcasing their connection with their African roots and heritage through ways that are within their control, such as clothing. They choose deliberately to express their beliefs through the use of modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs (Patrick, 2005). Whereas most available literature emphasises the relevance of personal branding to fulfill professional goals (McCorkle, 1992; Clare, 2002), the participants also establish

their personal brands through the incorporation of modernised Afrocentric fashion designs to attain personal or social goals such as portraying of and connecting to their identities and addressing nostalgic feelings (Shepherd, 2005).

Allman (2004) states that most designers in Africa create clothing items that fulfil a specific purpose or meaning. This corresponds to the statements made by all the participants that Afrocentric fashion was a way to address and express Africanism. However, various connections and relations to the concept of Africanism were provided by the participants. Five participants defined Afrocentric fashion as fashion that is rooted in Africa and feeds into the African traditions and cultures. Participant 1 expressed it as follows: *“It’s being African described in a clothing form - you can express the way you address your Africanism through clothing”*. Participant 4 clarified that not all clothing coming from Africa, can be classified as Afrocentric, it must embody an African aesthetic aspect in order to qualify as a form of Afrocentric wear and this participant also highlighted that Afrocentric fashion items do not only originate in Africa: *“Not all fashion emerging out of these fashion weeks and out of fashion industries across Africa are Afrocentric though - so it comes down to whether it is portraying African ideas, imagery. It’s a hard question because it asks - what is African? - which is so vast. Afrocentric fashion is also not necessarily fashion that is made in Africa - if European design houses copy African aesthetics and designs, they are still Afrocentric”*.

In accordance with findings by Patrick (2005), five participants agreed that there is a conscious symbolic reason behind choosing to incorporate Afrocentric fashion symbols into their personal brands which can be linked to a need to connect with Africanism. Participant 2 stated: *“There’s definitely a conscious symbolic meaning for me as I’ve expressed before, connection to my Africanness, celebrating African beauty - which ties back to that symbolic meaning”*.

When asked their opinion on whether the use of Afrocentric fashion symbols in modern fashion design has diluted the cultural significance of the garb (Jennings, 2017), four participants argued that the world is evolving and therefore Afrocentric fashion needs to evolve with the world and for as long as Africans continue to provide awareness of the meaning and significance of the symbols, the culture will remain. Participant 2 articulated that certain garments which are reserved for sacred functions can only be modernised to a certain degree, but they will always maintain the same aesthetic value and therefore the meaning and traditions instilled in the design of these garments cannot be swayed. Four other participants, however, disagreed with this and mentioned that once large retailers are mass-producing Afrocentric fashion items, it dilutes the culture as they are then creating garments based on what they believe is the Western ideal of modernity. They would use a piece of fabric, the meaning of which they are unaware of, for clothes just for the sake of making sales (Hansen, 2004). Participant 7 expressed it as follows: *“I think that there are times where it can be fashion for fashion sake, it’s like taking western clothing and inserting African print and therefore making it Afrocentric”*.

When it came to Afrocentric fashion being used and borrowed by international designers on international platforms (Rovine, 2013), five participants were in favour of this as long as the designers give credit to the minorities from whom they got inspiration for their designs, as these symbols are integral to the identities of the minority groups. Three participants disagreed, stating that international designers would be stealing Afrocentric fashion symbols and patronising African culture as they are simply creating garments for fashion's sake and that they subsequently commercialise sacred traditions. Participant 7 added a condition related to race: *“If it’s white people then NO NO NO, but it’s okay with African Americans who identify themselves as Africans and would like to express that, so yes, I think they should do more of it so that we can see how our Northern African sisters and brothers are connecting to the Southern African brothers and sisters”*.

When asked about the general use of Afrocentric fashion symbols, six participants do not believe that Afrocentric fashion should be preserved for people of African heritage as the phenomenon needs to be engaged with regularly and should be celebrated by all people for it to survive. This corresponds with the statements of Jennings (2017), which states that the growth in popularity and mass consumption of Afrocentric fashion symbols is based on the fact that the items are now more relatable, accessible and hence wearable. The following two participants were of the view that Afrocentric fashion symbols belong to Africans and it is necessary to preserve their culture and identity, therefore, Africa should be the only source and reference of Afrocentric fashion as it belongs to them. Participant 6 pronounced: *“I think that as Africans we need to preserve our designs and cultures, I feel like it should be attributed to us Africans, we should also be identified as the source”*. Participant 3 disagreed, declaring that for progress to occur, there is a need to support the black community regardless of their geographic location and they would purchase the Afrocentric items to gain insight into what markets outside Africa are doing with Afrocentric fashion symbols.

#### **5.4.1.2 Self-expression**

Self-expression is defined as an expression of one's personality, emotions or ideas especially through art, music or acting (Hornby & Turnbull, 2010). In this study, the term refers to clothing choices. The clothing choices of the participants clearly represented self-expression.

According to the participants, it is important to have a personal brand because it is a means to communicate and showcase to the world who they are and to cement their identity (Morton, 2011). It is an avenue the participants can use to tell their stories and attract desired attention and opportunities. Participant 4 said: *“My personal brand*

*introduces me before I can introduce myself and can do a lot of work for me - saving me the time and effort - to impress or paint a picture of myself".* Participant 7 stated that although she does not think it is something of high importance, it is something that happens naturally whether we care for it or not: *"I don't think it's something that is important but it's something that we do inherently. Who we are is our brand and I think that 'branding' is just communicating to people what that is. When we go through that journey of discovering who we are, it leads us to that point of a personal brand. It shows that you are not all over the show, that this is my being, it's solid and founded in knowing who I am".*

Participants portray to perceivers who they are and what they believe in through their clothing choices (Barnett, 2010). Participant 2 stated: *"I think I just want it (my clothing) to say that I'm proudly African and identify strongly with my Africanness.* Participant 8 added: *"When I travel and wear an African dress, everybody immediately knows that I'm definitely from Africa".* When one encounters an individual wearing Afrocentric fashion symbols, one is immediately able to identify the person's beliefs, ideas and values (Aspers & Godart, 2013). It was clear that choosing to associate with Afrocentric fashion symbols is a way for participants to represent their ideal self to the masses without having to make physical contact with these people.

*"If we look at Afrocentric fashion, it's an understanding of us expressing ourselves through the medium of clothes"* (participant 7). Through incorporating Afrocentric fashion symbols into their daily wear, the participants can share aspects of who they are with observers - aspects such as mood, beliefs and personality amongst others (Howlett et al, 2013). The following statement by participant 6 supports this: *"If you see somebody in the boardroom with an African print or an African fabric, firstly you should know that that person is bold and opinionated; he/she will not keep quiet if you step on their toes because for them to be able to express their fashion sense in such an environment, shows how probably bold or confident they are about what they think".*

This aspect clearly indicates that the participants' need for self-expression is fulfilled by choosing to make Afrocentric designs part of their personal brands (Shepherd, 2005).

All the participants used Afrocentric fashion designs to build their personal brands and are immediately linked by observers to what Afrocentric fashion stands for. The participants were all in agreement that the use of Afrocentric fashion symbols in their personal brands has helped them to stand out (Reid, 2011). Participant 4 expressed it as follows: *"I definitely think Afrocentric fashion has enabled my brand to stand out - not least of all because I am a Caucasian African, it's striking to see me in a full-on African ensemble and immediately people take notice"*. The participants differentiate themselves from the crowd through the way they dress, and this attracts interest, according to participant 4: *"I do get a lot of attention in Afrocentric clothes - people want to take my picture and think that I look fantastic"*. Some participants stated that they wear Afrocentric fashion symbols to look different, while others stated that it has nothing to do with looking different. Participant 4 explained: *"Sometimes I don't wear Afrocentric clothes because I don't want to be different. The being different part is the least of why I wear Afrocentric clothes - it's a lot more to do with me loving the vibrancy and how I feel and genuinely loving the look of the clothes"*.

When questioned whether social media engagement contributed towards the portrayal of the participants personal brand and their choice to engage with modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs, most of the participants agreed, stating that social media platforms enable them to reach a wide audience globally which they would not have had the opportunity to do otherwise. Kaplan and Haenlien (2010) found that social media platforms enable consumers to create and share content with their target segments across borders. Participant 2 stated: *"I don't get to see the same people every day, so sometimes someone that I encounter once may not know that I wear Afrocentric fashion designs daily, however, if they are to come into contact with my social media*

*page, they would immediately identify my Afrocentric style. It is also encouraging to upload content as my followers like and comment on my images and show appreciation and interest*". Participant 6 agreed, saying that *"social media platforms allow us to choose exactly how we want the world to perceive us, it helps us to create and cement our personal brands across people who we may never even meet face-to-face. It also provides me with a global platform where I can showcase my pride in wearing my African clothing and exchange ideas and information with others who do so"*. The participants indicated that although they also use social media for networking purposes, they mostly engage in social media for personal purposes and self-gratification. *"The consistent communication with like-minded people inspires me to learn more about Afrocentric fashion, for example, I learn about new fabrics and where to purchase them, it also sparks my creativity for my designs and enables me to create clothes that make me look and feel good"*, said participant 1. This correlates with the findings of Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) that user experience on social media is linked to the experience a person attains from social interaction. According to the participants responses, their engagements on social media serve to fulfil their personal goals by allowing them to express themselves and therefore attain self-gratification.

In discussing their engagement with modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs, seven of the eight participants agreed that these modern designs are more wearable, more accessible for purchase, more recognisable and created an ease of incorporation into daily dress in comparison to the bulkier, more traditional attires that draw a lot of attention and are reserved for special occasions (Olshin, 2006). As stated by participant 5: *"With the urbanisation of Afrocentric fashion, young and older people alike can wear it on an everyday basis, for example, officially to work, to a casual lunch with friends and even to elegant red-carpet dinners and events"*. The style is therefore no longer seen as primitive or reserved for older people.

The use of modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs has enabled an evolution of the style and a shift in mindset regarding the concept, which now incorporates new and fresh ideas that do not box the phenomena around tradition and age (Austin, 2012). Participant 5's statement correlates with this: *"Previously people only thought of Afrocentric fashion to be for the older community or as formal wear to be worn at traditional ceremonies like weddings"*. Items are now easily accessible and celebrated which has broken the stigma attached to the garments and enabled them to transmute from costumes reserved for special occasions to everyday wear (Rovine, 2013).

All participants agreed that modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs originated in Africa in order to create clothing items that can compete with the fashions of the international world, and which would appeal to the younger generations to encourage them to support the trend. The Western world then picked up on this trend and started to produce their own versions of Afrocentric fashion and mass-produced products for a wider global market (Rovine, 2013). Participant 1 is of the view that: *"It (modernised Afrocentric clothing) started in Africa and the West is just catching up - the West is taking our trends and selling them to us, the West has taken such keen interest in our fabrics and tried to modernise them and make garments that they can celebrate"*. All the participants agreed that Afrocentric garments are combined with Western garments for daily wear and that full African outfits are usually preserved for special occasions as they are not easy to wear casually (Jennings, 2017).

While two participants disagreed that their clothing choice often reflects some sort of political or cultural association, six supported this statement as they are deliberately showcasing their beliefs and values and how strongly they stand by them. Participant 4 stated: *"I hope it communicates that I'm as 'woke' as I am and that I'm for the development of Africa and the protection of people's freedoms and rights - especially*

*the marginalised*". Participant 7 said: *"I think to be black is thought to be political. Yes, it does. It is also a sense of pride, to be proud I have to wear the things that I wear, unfortunately in my country that is seen as me making a political statement"*.

#### **5.4.2. PRIDE**

For the purpose of this study, pride was defined in relation to satisfaction, to feel pleased to be associated with something or someone you are closely connected with (Hornby & Turnbull, 2010). Throughout the interviews, participants repeatedly mentioned the feeling of pride when they wear Afrocentric fashion symbols, which clearly points to the fulfilment of a personal goal. The themes that emerged from this category were **Celebration** and **Beauty**.

##### **5.4.2.1 Celebration**

The participants claimed that their use of modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs is a form of celebration - the acknowledgement of something significant (Stevenson & Lindberg, 2010). Through their daily interaction with Afrocentric fashion designs, participants want to celebrate African ideals and excellence. Participant 1 articulated it as follows: *"What I'm trying to achieve at the end of the day is to showcase that as Africans, we can have our own thing that we are able to create, and it can be celebrated"*. The narrative regarding Africa has recently shifted from negative/primitive to positive and Afrocentric clothing is no longer seen as "aged, costume or propaganda" (Austin, 2012:120). As became clear from the interviews, the younger generations are proudly incorporating Afrocentric fashion garments into their daily wear as a form of celebration of their origins and traditions. In accordance with Fashion Diffusion Theory (Rogers, 1976), the youth are taking the initiative to put these garments into the spotlight and have them globally acknowledged and celebrated, be it through daily wear

or posting pictures with powerful and uplifting captions on their social media profiles, where they can be accessed across the world. Participant 3 said: *“In places where I know that there isn’t an African presence or celebration of Africanness, I want to take my Africanness to that place, so I know I’ll look different, but I’ll be doing it deliberately to celebrate and bring recognition to my Africanness and show my pride in it”*. This correlates with the study by Rogers (1976) that found fashion has to be exposed to society before it will be accepted. The participants choose to participate in the notion of Afrocentric fashion through modernised designs in order to express pride and celebration of the African continent (Rabine, 2002). Participant 4 expressed it as follows: *“I think that Africa’s power is in its Africanness - one just has to look at the Black Panther film and how empowering that was for so many African people to watch and how much of a global movement the film was - we became completely Wakanda obsessed and celebrated the celebration of African excellence and Afrocentric ideals”*.

#### **5.4.2.2 Beauty**

The participants also repeatedly highlighted the beauty present in the garments of the diverse cultures of Africa. This aspect was praised by all the participants as they all made mention of the beauty of not only the garments, but of the continent as a whole. Participant 5 expressed it as follows: *“I’m passionate about Africa, I believe so much in the continent’s depth, beauty and intricacy of our cultures”*. Aspects that were highlighted were the colours of the fabrics, the vibrancy of the prints and the admiration attained by the participants when they chose to incorporate the fabrics into their daily wear. Participant 2 stated: *“I’ll have people say that that’s such a beautiful fabric, and ask where I got it, or about where I got my clothing item”*. Participants wanted to show off the diversity of the continent through their clothes. Choosing to incorporate modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs is a way to showcase it to the world, and in so doing, change the narrative on the beauty that lies within Africa (Reid, 2011).

It became apparent that the participants want to portray, through their clothing choices, their sense of pride in who they are and encourage other Africans to express their Africanism freely without a need for public acceptance or permission: *“I don’t believe that as Africans we need permission to wear traditional wear to work, why must I wear my suit to work Monday to Friday and if I want to wear my African attire I need to wait for permission”*, according to participant 6. When asked why they choose to incorporate Afrocentric fashion into their personal brands, all eight participants tied their association to a sense of pride and a means to celebrate and promote their Africanism. Participant 1 said: *“I wear Afrocentric fashion symbols to celebrate my heritage - celebrate my proudly African moments through fashion.”* Participant 4 supported this statement, adding: *“I want to communicate my pride and power in my dress”*. One of the focal points that evoked pride in the participants was the beauty of the fabric. Different elements, such as patterns, prints and colours were admired. Participant 5 stated: *“I love prints and bright colours and I use the African print fabrics to showcase the beauty and diversity that is Africa”*. The beauty aspects did not only focus on the appearance of the fabrics, but it is also linked to the African cultures: *“I also want to encourage more Africans to embrace the beauty of their culture and stop being dictated to too much by the Western world”* (Participant 6). Wearing Afrocentric fashion fashions seems to enable participants to publicly proclaim and celebrate their heritage (Rabine, 2002): *“The diversity of culture in South Africa is something that we all know, but I think we need more visual reminders of - I think that that's what fashion serves as - this outward indicator and statement. I think that it's no use in knowing these things at the back of our minds - they must be publicly celebrated and given an opportunity to take the spotlight, to be mindfully acknowledged and formally celebrated”* (Participant 4).

#### **5.4.3. LANGUAGE**

Since Afrocentric fashion symbols are packed with meaning, it became apparent that the concept is seen as a kind of language. Language can be defined as “a way of expressing ideas and feelings using movements, symbols and sounds” (Hornby & Turnbull, 2010). Under this category, the themes of **Communication** and **Meaning of cultural symbols** emerged.

#### **5.4.3.1 Communication**

All the participants agreed that Afrocentric fashion symbols served as a form of communication, either speaking for them or to them. Through the adoption of Afrocentric fashion symbols into their daily lives, the participants are making statements to all the people they encounter on a daily basis (Barnard, 2002). There is no need to explain themselves in most cases when it comes to their values and beliefs because their clothes speak for them. The type of attire chosen can also be a means of communication, for example, full Afrocentric attire can be an indication of celebrations, such as weddings and the coming of age for males (Shamina, 2011). The choice of clothing also enables the participants to identify other like-minded people who speak a similar language and have similar ideals to theirs (Aspers & Godart, 2013). The actual symbols present on Afrocentric fashion garments also carry specific meaning which may not be understood by the masses. Participant 3 stated that Afrocentric fashion symbols speak a language: *“I don’t believe that’s something any other continent has, the ability to talk to each other through our clothing, the fact that we don’t even recognise that power is sad because we could literally be having conversations with each other that no one else knows about if we were really able to utilise this tool”*.

#### **5.4.3.2 Meaning of cultural symbols**

The participants further claimed to have incorporated Afrocentric fashion symbols into their daily wear because of the meaning of cultural symbols. This correlates with a study by Howlett, et al., (2013) that found that human beings do not tend to follow trends unless they hold some sort of meaning for them. All the participants agreed that there was some sort of meaning carried by Afrocentric fashion symbols. Participant 3 said: *“I haven’t yet come across a symbol system that has no meaning, so it’s never just the aesthetic, there is meaning assigned because it is its own language”*. The term *meaning* can carry two definitions in this case: a form of significance, as well as a signification. The participants included both aspects into their responses during the study. The choice to incorporate Afrocentric fashion symbols into their daily wear was of high significance to the participants as it was something that they engaged with on a cultural and traditional level and it became a way for them to portray their values and beliefs (Barnard, 2002) This enables them to satisfy personal goals, such as self-expression and self-gratification (Shepherd, 2005). The participants achieved self-gratification by proudly showcasing that they are in touch with their roots and the fundamental cornerstones of their upbringing through their clothing choices (Barnard, 2002). The participants also touched on the connotations that the cultural symbols used in Afrocentric fashion clothing carry. These symbols form a language and create a meaning that is sacred to the cultures and people of Africa, hence, the participants stated that Afrocentric fashion symbols can never fade away because of their intrinsic value in people's lives (Barthes, 2012).

Participant 7 said *“The prints and the symbols represent a particular language - the way we communicate that this is who we are”*. This was supported by the following remark by participant 3: *“Whether it’s a mathematical concept or an abstract concept, there’s always meaning behind it. I think the symbols are really powerful and a means of telling stories to each other”*. There are particular cuts, fabrics and garments that are used to communicate major events, such as weddings, the coming of age of a man, and motherhood (Shamina, 2011). An important aspect that came to light was that although

the symbols as they appear on the fabrics have certain intrinsic meanings, the specific meanings that the symbol and pattern carry are not known or understood by the masses: *“I think it’s just sad that we for the most part have forgotten those meanings and they are now meanings that only exist in special books or to the artist that make these things, but on a broader perspective, we don’t really understand these meanings”* (Participant 4). Participant 6 stated: *“Currently we pay less attention to the significance of the symbols, it is more about the style, the colour, the texture, the feel and the look.”* Three other participants apparently agreed with this as they only commented on the aesthetics of the fabrics *per se* without delving deeper into any meaning behind the symbols and patterns on the fabric. Participant 1 stated that the importance and celebration of Afrocentric clothing lays only in its origin - Africa. Two others disagreed with this and argued that Afrocentric clothing is packed with powerful meaning, which is either unknown or under-utilised by the people who are choosing to engage with the fabric - there is more to each piece of traditional Afrocentric clothing than what meets the eye (Reddock & Rhoda. 2014). The underlying existence of such meanings is what makes them special as identifiers for the African continent and cultures (Wanzie, 1964). In accordance with Barnard (2002), who focuses on the use of clothing and appearance as a communicator, by choosing to wear Afrocentric fashion symbols, the participants are carrying along a message and making some sort of statement to people they encounter as they are immediately associated with their African culture: *“I have been working at a company for a year now and every day I wear something African, so they know and they can guess what I will be wearing tomorrow, although they can’t tell the colour of my clothes, they can tell that I will be wearing something African”*, according to participant 6.

#### **5.4.4. UNITY**

By analysing the responses of the participants, unity was identified as a major category in the study and the following themes emerged: **Social inclusion** and **Advancement of Africanism**. For the purpose of this study, the term *Unity* is defined as “a state of being joined together to form one unit” (Hornby & Turnbull, 2010).

#### **5.4.4.1 Social Inclusion**

With regard to **Social Inclusion**, all the participants stated that they have chosen to incorporate Afrocentric fashion symbols into their personal brands in order to make a statement about who they are and what they believe in (Barnard, 2002). They use their choice of clothing to portray their attachment to the Afrocentric movement which focuses mainly on African interests, values and perspectives (Hartzenberg, 2019). These individuals use this as a means to connect with not only their Africanism, but also to identify and associate with like-minded individuals in social settings who share the same sentiments as they do and also choose to participate in representing Africa through their choice of clothing (Aspers & Godart, 2013): *“I definitely associate with like-minded people and I enjoy when I'm in a place and we're all dressed and sharing information on our clothing”* (Participant 2). Therefore, wearing modernised Afrocentric fashion designs enabled the participants to fulfill the social goal of belonging to a group (Aspers & Godart, 2013).

#### **5.4.4.2 Advancement of Africanism**

Regarding **Advancement of Africanism**, it was noted through the interviews that the participants make a deliberate effort to wear Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs in order to connect with and empower the people of the African continent. There were various reasons highlighted, be it to shift mindsets regarding the perception of Africa, the need to encourage and support African businesses or to establish an African

presence in areas where it is lacking. The participants asserted that an association with Afrocentric fashion gave them a sense of control and power, whether this is in a personal sense or with regard to the continent (McLeod, 2014). Participant 3 stated: *“I feel like with these symbols I’m imbuing a certain type of power because I know what meaning those symbols carry, ascribing meaning to something is a very powerful thing”*.

When it comes to purchasing Afrocentric fashions, all the participants claimed that they either purchase ready-made products from designers in South Africa or around the continent or they purchase Afrocentric fabric and co-operate with an African tailor to create designs that they envision and would like to wear. *“I get most of my Afrocentric clothes tailored by various West African tailors. I shop material and then take it to tailors with a vision and we sit down together and collaboratively see what’s possible”* (Participant 4). Seven participants even went as far as to say that if the Afrocentric fashion item does not originate in Africa, they would not purchase it as it then loses its African authenticity.

Engaging with Afrocentric fashion symbols enables participants to ignite meaningful and uplifting conversations with other like-minded individuals with whom they can discuss ideas, share perspectives and celebrate their African pride: *“It unites us behind a love for advancing Africa and the vision for how Africa could be if it embraced itself fully,”* according to Participant 4. It also enables participants to share and grow their knowledge on the topic, as articulated by participant 3: *“It’s a nice way to identify my people, associate with them and generate conversation about why we do what we do, gain numerous perspectives and engage with people of the same mindset in order to grow and develop my own knowledge”*. This results in a shared understanding and a positive step towards the greater cause of a better Africa (Rovine, 2013). Participant 4 added additional insight: *“I think that it’s the right thing to do - to encourage Afrocentric*

*fashion means to support local businesses and look out for fellow African brothers and sisters' livelihoods".*

The participants were asked whether the film *Black Panther* has played a role in the increase in popularity of Afrocentric fashion and an increase in the number of people incorporating Afrocentric fashion into their personal brands. All participants agreed, highlighting how Africans from all around the world united and attended the film's premiere dressed in Afrocentric fashion items. In accordance with Social Media Engagement Theory (Laroche, Habibi & Richard, 2012), Participant 7 said: *"You can't deny that over that time, at cinemas across the globe, black folks were flocking in wearing African clothes - that didn't happen on a day to day basis, we were all posting online about going to the cinema to watch the movie in our African gear"*. They felt that the portrayal of Africa in the film was empowering and encouraging of the development of Africa, which helped to break walls and remove the stigma attached to some people's perception of Africa. Participant 4 expressed it as follows: *"The movie has played a role in black pride, African pride and that has propelled people to embrace and celebrate that more"*. Participant 7 said: *"You get people who are invested in something and some that just gain interest due to popularity, so something as big as a Marvel movie has most certainly created a sense of unity amongst Africans across the globe. And the movie provided inspiration and ideas based on the amount of pride arisen from the movie. You can now see more dashiki inspired prom dresses on the Internet, people love pop culture"*.

## **5.5 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF CHAPTER**

After careful consideration, it was concluded that the code that related most to all the identified themes is Africanness/Africanism (See Chapter 4: Selective Coding – Saldana, 2009: 164).

This chapter explained how the gathered data was analysed and interpreted. Comprehensive and accurate descriptions of the interviews were provided to ensure trustworthiness, as well as to capture the exact perceptions and feelings of the participants when answering the questions posed to them. A second coder was utilised to ensure credibility. The use of memoing made valuable additional contributions in ensuring that all reactions and feelings were noted and interpreted accurately. The information gathered was interpreted in relation to the literature and theories identified earlier in the study, which provided additional credibility to the analysis and interpretation of the data.

Four main categories were identified and discussed, namely: Identity, Pride, Language and Unity. Six themes were identified with each category encompassing two themes: Under Identity, Africanism and Self-expression emerged. Under Pride, Celebration and Beauty emerged. Under Language, Communication and Meaning of Cultural Symbols emerged and under Unity, Social Interaction and Advancement of Africanism emerged. These recurrent concepts in the data transcriptions were interpreted and discussed within the contexts of modernised Afrocentric fashions and personal branding in order to obtain answers to the research questions of the study.

In the last chapter, Chapter 6, the study is concluded by discussing the findings that have resulted from the research. The limitations of the study are discussed, and recommendations are offered for future research related to modernised Afrocentric fashion and personal branding.

# **CHAPTER SIX**

## **FINDINGS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

## **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous chapter, the research methods that were used in this qualitative study were outlined. With the assistance of the conceptual framework, four main categories of data were identified from which eight themes emerged.

The collected data was analysed within the interpretative paradigm to reach a deeper understanding of the use of modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs for personal brand building according to the four categories identified.

Apart from face-to-face interpersonal interactions, earlier chapters also explored the consequences of the extraordinary growth of social media (in terms of the complexity and speed of communication) for shaping perceptions and relationships in terms of personal branding (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011).

In this chapter, the findings are based on the data that was collected, analysed and interpreted during the study. The interpretation was directed by the theoretical framework, as well as existing research studies covered in Chapters 2 and 3. In this chapter the findings are employed to answer the research questions, to assist in solving the research problem and to address the goal and overall purpose of the study as outlined in Chapter 1.

Finally, the limitations of the study are considered, possible contributions of the study are discussed, and recommendations are made to assist future research on the topic.

## 6.2 RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of the study was firstly to explore why Afrocentric fashion influencers purposefully use modernised Afrocentric fashion designs to enhance their personal brands, and secondly, to explore whether the use of these designs in personal brands, apart from being used for professional/commercial purposes, also fulfil personal or social needs.

The purpose of the study led to the formulation of the following research questions: Firstly, what are the motivations of a selection of 20-30 year old urban South Africans who represent active/overt personal brands, for purposefully choosing modernised Afrocentric fashion designs to establish and reinforce their personal brands? Secondly, the following sub-question was formulated: Apart from using personal brands for professional/commercial purposes, does the use of modernised Afrocentric fashion designs in personal brands also fulfil personal or social needs?

As stated earlier, the predominant discourse around branding, as well as most of the existing research in the field of personal branding has been from the perspective of achieving **professional/commercial** goals (McCorkle 1992; Clare, 2002; Shepherd, 2005). Since most of the participants conduct Afrocentric fashion-related businesses, it was not surprising that their personal brands feature modernised Afrocentric fashions in order to achieve the professional/commercial goals. However, there was still a need to explore whether the use of these designs in personal brands, apart from being used for professional/commercial purposes, also fulfil personal or social needs. It should be kept in mind that these different goals are in many respects interrelated with each other.

After analysing the in-depth interviews conducted with the participants, the following findings were made (discussed in order of perceived importance):

### 6.2.1 IDENTITY AND PRIDE

The first finding was related to both the **IDENTITY** and **PRIDE** categories. It was found that modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs enable the participants to (through their choice of clothing) portray elements and aspects of their personalities, values and beliefs to the world on a day-to-day basis, thereby facilitating **self-expression** via their personal brands. This finding is in accordance with the theories on the functions of clothing, as discussed by Barnard (2002) in his book titled *Fashion as a Communicator*. Choosing to wear modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs therefore enriches their **identity** and their **pride** to be of African heritage. As argued by Allman (2004), wearing Afrocentric fashion items enable people to celebrate their culture and portray their beliefs as opposed to just making a fashion statement. Afrocentric fashion symbols are directly linked to the African continent and therefore wearing and identifying with these symbols indicate acceptance of and pride in the participants' African heritage and **Africanism**. This finding correlates with the views of various authors (Jennings, 2017; Patrick 2005; Rabbine, 2002; Rovine, 2015), who indicated that with the positive shift in mindsets regarding the African continent, there has been an increased growth in the use and appreciation of African motifs globally. Afrocentric fashion, previously preserved for people of the African continent to symbolise culture and tradition, has now been incorporated into daily fashion choices by people all around the world as a sign of nostalgia and pride in their African heritage.

Participants indicated that they want to **celebrate** and showcase their sense of pride in who they are and in so doing encourage other Africans to openly express their own innate **Africanism** through their choice of clothing. Choosing specific fabrics and

designs (featuring **beautiful**, vibrant and diverse Afrocentric fashion symbols) enable participants to portray a true representation of who they are and enable observers to immediately identify particular aspects of their personalities, such as their heritage, as part of their personal brands.

The way in which modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs are used, facilitates an ease of wear and makes them more relatable, more accessible and easier to incorporate into daily, personal style. The participants are therefore enabled to establish their personal brands by choosing and wearing modern styles of clothing that are to their taste and preference and simultaneously proclaim their pride in their heritage. Afrocentric fashion is no longer reserved for special occasions and the participants are wearing it everywhere - to work, to socialise with friends and even to present their pride in their heritage when travelling outside the African continent. Participants indicated that people are also no longer reserving these garments for public holidays, such as Heritage Day, or traditional ceremonies such as weddings or induction.

Social media platforms have enabled a vast international distribution of information in real time. It is no longer necessary to be in a particular place at a particular time to observe certain elements, for example, when the participants post their outfits on social media platforms, people from all over the world have access to it in their own time. Such people perceive that a specific individual is proud of his or her African heritage since it is the outstanding characteristic of the individual's personal brand. Thus, diverse people from all over the world can form opinions or make judgments about an individual's appearance and personality, which are strongly linked to his or her personal brand. Simultaneously, such an individual's commercial interests are also promoted by his or her personal brand.

For these reasons, the participants are very actively involved in, and very particular about their choice of Afrocentric fashion clothing. For example, they indicated that they would not purchase Afrocentric clothing outside the African continent because they want the garments to represent their origin in Africa. This leads to the gratification of profession/commercial needs, as well as personal and social needs. The intrinsic meaning attached to the origin and symbolism of the clothing makes the garments much more than just a piece of cloth. This is why most of the participants collaborate with designers to create their garments. They want to be responsible for the final result and want to be actively involved in the choices they make regarding what they wear. They would not engage with any clothing items that are not a direct representation of who they are.

### **6.2.2 LANGUAGE**

Another finding related to the category of **LANGUAGE**. It was found that incorporating modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs into their personal brands, via their daily clothing choices, provides the participants with an avenue through which they can express and communicate their ideals and worldview with observers. This is in accordance with nonverbal communication theory which indicates that messages are also transmitted to observers through various silent mediums, such as clothing. Individuals do not have to speak to onlookers to communicate their views and beliefs, but can use various other means, such as to use their clothing to speak for them. For example, by incorporating modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs into their daily wear, they are communicating their pride and connection to the African continent (Hall, 1959; Gamble & Gamble, 2013).

All the participants indicated that they are keen to interact with like-minded people who share similar ideals and for this reason they spark up **conversations** and share ideas and knowledge on the concept. It was found that at such occasions they always discuss

their clothing and where the items were purchased. Additionally, the participants also love to take pictures together, which then creates an opportunity for **word-of-mouth** or **electronic word-of-mouth** recommendations, which leads to the promotion of their Afrocentric brands. The value of this is that the information is being shared directly to a target audience, thus increasing the chance of inspiring them to purchase the items.

By cautiously choosing which designs, signs and symbols to incorporate into their daily attire, participants communicate various messages, such as their values, beliefs and culture amongst others (Miller, 2011). A great deal of information is shared by the wearer, especially with those that understand the symbolism and significance of the clothing attire. It thus provides the wearer with the opportunity to establish his or her personal brand within the Afrocentric fashion society.

According to symbolic interactionism, objects gain deeper meaning when the current meaning that they carry, becomes the topic of discussion. The participants discuss amongst themselves the meaning their garments hold for them, and this interpersonal interaction then establishes a deeper meaning to their garments, which can in turn increase the impact and significance of the garments that were discussed.

It was thus found that through incorporating Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs into their personal brands, participants are not only able to easily identify with those similar to them, but it also gives them an opportunity to further their knowledge on the concept, it sparks conversation and provides a sense of belonging (fulfilling personal and social goals).

A further significant finding in the category of **LANGUAGE** related to the **meaning of cultural symbols**. It was found that most of the participants were not knowledgeable regarding the specific meanings that the particular symbols on Afrocentric fashion items

carry. However, because they have been introduced to the phenomenon at a young age, mostly by their mothers, they indicated that they are aware that Afrocentric fashion symbols hold an intrinsic significance when it comes to their culture and identity. One of the participants explained that nowadays the symbolism on the fabric is not significant anymore, and that what matters is the origin of the fabric - which supports the reason why most participants will not buy Afrocentric clothing outside Africa. The significance lies in the need to support and represent the African fabric *per se*, as opposed to the specific meanings of the symbols which were historically the outstanding element of the clothing (Jennings, 2011).

One participant said: *"We wear local and choose Africa in our dress - it's like a reclaim on our identity"*. The use of the word "reclaim" may support the theory of cultural appropriation (Nicholas, 2017), as cultural appropriation may pose a threat to the culture being appropriated in that it could easily result in the dilution of the traditions and heritage attached to the symbols that are being appropriated. On a global level, international designers are borrowing African motifs and are using them in their fashion collections, ignoring the meanings or origins of these symbols, and not giving reference to the cultures from which they are borrowing these symbols. These garments are then mass-produced and consumed globally. Even though the public is thus exposed to modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs on a large scale, they are unaware of the significance and meaning that the specific symbols carry in the traditions and cultures to which they belong. This also happens on a smaller scale within the African continent. A number of participants indicated that they purchase Afrocentric fashion items and fabrics from all over the African continent, for example, from countries such as Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya and Zambia. As mentioned, they do not necessarily understand the meaning carried within the symbols on the items and fabrics that they have purchased and are not really concerned with these meanings, but focus more on the origin of the fabrics, which gives it validity to be classified as Afrocentric fashion symbols. Therefore, participants are also in a way appropriating the Afrocentric fashion

symbols that they use, but because they share a similar heritage, it is not seen as appropriation. However, it was found that since each item and piece of fabric bears meaning to its place of origin, it (if understood) can facilitate more meaningful communication within the African culture. This is a powerful tool since the Afrocentric clothes that are worn, transmit messages on the wearer's behalf and yet it is being underutilised because participants are reliant on the fact that simply wearing the fabric is enough to communicate and symbolise that they are of African descent.

On the other hand, it was found that some traditional Afrocentric clothing and symbolism cannot lose its meaning or be appropriated because no matter how much it may be modified, the meaning will always be recognised and will remain the same, for example, the traditional attire worn to ceremonies such as weddings, initiation and funerals.

This finding addressed the question whether participants use Afrocentric fashion symbols because the actual symbols on the garments speak to their inner core and represent aspects of their personalities (for example, garments that make them feel free and peaceful or garments that carry symbols that represent peace or freedom), or whether they are more focused on the significance and representation that the garments have to African culture as such. This aspect should be taken into consideration when analysing whether people purposefully engage with the symbolic values embedded in modern Afrocentric designs to build their own personal brands. Allman (2004) found that most designers in Africa do not merely produce clothing items for the sake of their appearance, but take the actual symbols, their colours and shapes into consideration as these carry a specific meaning or have a specific purpose. Some Afrocentric clothing items, such as the Ndebele triangle and the Basutu blanket, are widely recognised and have distinguished meanings and therefore cannot be used inappropriately without creating outrage. It is therefore important for designers using Afrocentric fashion symbols to research their choice of fabrics and symbols, as the

meanings and spirituality embedded in such Afrocentric fashion items are taken very seriously because they are true representatives of Africanism and carry a heavy and significant meaning for the individual, as well as for the culture (Wanzie, 1964).

### **6.2.3 UNITY**

The last finding related to the category of **UNITY**. It was found that interpersonal connection results in feelings of social inclusion and advancement of Africanism. It provides young South Africans who use modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs for personal brand building with a sense of **UNITY** with other like-minded individuals who share the same goal of embracing and advancing the African continent.

Aspers and Godart (2013) state that fashion is inclusive, but also exclusive in that fashion items have the power to unite groups of people on the one hand, or to enable individuals to stand out from a crowd on the other hand. Here the focus was on the inclusion aspect and it was found that modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs enable the wearers to identify others who share a similar mindset. Since modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs are only gradually gaining popularity (Reid, 2011), it is not common to enter a public space and find an entire group of people wearing such designs and therefore it is particularly useful for individuals who incorporate these symbols in their daily dress to spot similarly dressed people in a crowd. It was found that they then automatically gravitate towards each other.

## **6.3 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY**

The findings of the study make a significant contribution towards a more in-depth understanding of the topic's multiple facets. It contributes to existing literature by providing rich and detailed information regarding the fulfilment of especially

personal/social goals through incorporating Afrocentric fashion symbols/designs in personal brands.

It became clear that personal brands that are characterised by the use of Afrocentric fashions have a twofold goal: usefulness for professional/commercial purposes, as well as for personal and social purposes. The professional/commercial uses of personal brands are well-documented in earlier studies (McCorkle, 1992; Clare, 2005), but the following more specific insights for the fashion industry are disclosed by this study:

- Due to the intrinsic meaning that Afrocentric fashion symbols carry and represent, individuals who choose to associate with these symbols do so on a deep level as the garments are a direct representation of the individuals' heritage, beliefs and values, which makes them willing to "live" the brand (Barthes, 2012). The findings of the study may therefore enable owners of Afrocentric fashion brands in the fashion industry to gain a deeper understanding of their target markets regarding which garments are bought, why these garments are bought and what exactly the garments mean to the target market (Babbie, 2014). This may enable business owners to better cater for their target markets, thus acquiring loyal, repeat customers who may consciously or unconsciously act as brand ambassadors and engage in word-of-mouth/electronic word-of-mouth marketing on their behalf. In the long run, this may improve the brands' efficiency and profits. It may also have financial advantages in saving money which would otherwise have been spent on marketing campaigns aimed at acquiring new customers and/or retaining loyal customers;
- It may assist young entrepreneurs who use modernised Afrocentric fashions for building their personal brands, to develop a deeper awareness of their motivations for doing so and may encourage them to incorporate these deeper

insights into the promotion/advertising of their own commercial interests/businesses.

- It may provide an opportunity for the fashion industry in general to gain more insight into the motivations behind clothing choices. This may assist them to produce clothing designs and styles that have deep-rooted personal and social meanings for consumers, resulting in better profits.

An important contribution of the study lies in the finding that personal brands in this field also fulfil personal and social needs for participants, such as the following:

- The design of the garments, the symbols on the fabric, or the fabric itself correlate with their values and core beliefs and make them **proud** of who they are as people and of their African heritage (**identity**).
- Wearing Afrocentric fashions enable them to **communicate** their ideals and beliefs with other people and the embedded **meanings of the cultural symbols** enable them to connect with their roots and their heritage in a way that is clearly identifiable by observers (**language**).
- Wearing Afrocentric fashions enable them to connect with other like-minded individuals who share the same ideals, facilitating **social inclusion** within the Afrocentric clothing community and sparking conversation about ways to **advance Africanism**, amongst other things (**unity**).

### 6.3 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

### **6.3.1 Limitations**

No evidence could be found of past research in the branding field on this specific topic in South Africa and therefore, the opportunity was seized to explore the motivations of Afrocentric fashion influencers for purposefully choosing modernised Afrocentric fashion designs to enhance their personal brands, and to investigate whether the use of these designs in personal brands, apart from professional/commercial purposes, also fulfils personal and social needs.

According to Du Plooy-Cilliers (2014), limitations to a study can be defined as any aspects that may cause issues and hinder the trustworthiness of the study. To note the limitations of a study (as well as to make recommendations for further study), are important aspects for future researchers to consider in order to avoid pitfalls, and to decide which aspects still need to be explored in order to build on literature regarding the topic.

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the topic. Qualitative studies of this nature usually use small sample sizes, which may be seen as a limitation. As there were only eight participants in this study, the results cannot be generalised to everyone that chooses to represent their personal brands by using modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs. However, since the study was interpretative of nature and fell within the symbolic interactionism paradigm, the aim was not to generalise results, but rather to build on existing theory and literature.

The sample profile may also be limiting as it contains mostly black females, which may not be representative of the population of the study.

The snowball sampling method that was used in the study may be viewed as a further limitation since the sourced participants may have similar viewpoints and behaviours as they are connected to one another, resulting in the possibility that their contributions could be subjective.

Time restrictions also posed a limitation. If the researcher had more time available, more data from more diverse sources could have been collected.

Another limitation could relate to the integrity of the participants as it is possible that they could have responded to questions in a certain way to fulfil personal agendas by promoting their own personal brands as opposed to neutrally and honestly participating in the study.

Since a researcher that uses thematic analysis as a research method is required to personally code, analyse and interpret the collected data, elements of subjectivity and researcher bias can never be discounted. In this study, a second coder was used to validate the trustworthiness of the findings and everything possible was done to remain detached and objective during the study. As mentioned above, this aspect did not pose a real threat to the study since it was an interpretive study which did not aim to produce generalisable results.

### **6.3.2 Recommendations for further research**

The following recommendations are made:

- In future studies on the same topic, larger and more diverse sample sizes, as well as focus groups could be used in order to improve the generalisability of the research. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies could be employed.
- A future study may focus on how individuals' personal branding (incorporating Afrocentric fashion symbols) may be used to motivate South African fashion designers and manufacturers to design and produce garments (on a large scale) that would fulfill the personal and social needs of a large proportion of the South African population.
- The only other prominent cultural garb in South Africa is of Indian origin. Therefore, a comparative study could be considered to compare inter alia whether the same or different needs are fulfilled by using Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs opposed to using traditional Indian fashion symbols and designs in personal brands.

#### **6.4 FINAL REMARKS**

The twofold nature of the needs that are addressed by using Afrocentric fashions for the portrayal of personal brands was highlighted. It was noted that the ease of wearing modernised Afrocentric fashion designs facilitates the use of these designs to portray personal brands. Both the fashion industry and entrepreneurs with personal brands characterised by Afrocentric fashions can benefit by the insights that were brought to light by this study.

The fashion industry may be inspired to better cater to their target markets, thus acquiring loyal, repeat customers. Regarding the professional/commercial needs of entrepreneurs, the study provided deeper insight into the significance of symbolism

within the branding field and how underlying meanings may enhance brand loyalty and 'living the brand'. A further benefit for entrepreneurs is the strong link to personal and social gratifications that was found, for example, affirming identity; proudness of African heritage; connection and communication with like-minded individuals; experiencing feelings of unity and a mutual desire to advance Africanism.

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## APPENDIX A - INTRODUCTORY LETTER



### INTRODUCTORY LETTER

#### **TITLE OF STUDY: AN EXPLORATION OF THE MOTIVATIONS FOR USING MODERNISED AFROCENTRIC FASHION DESIGNS TO ESTABLISH PERSONAL BRANDS**

Principal Investigator:

Name: Erika Butetsi Bugaari Balintulo

Phone: 0838995948

E-mail: [erikaboos@gmail.com](mailto:erikaboos@gmail.com)

Background:

You are being invited to take part in the above-mentioned research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Feel free to ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. The purpose of the study was firstly to explore why Afrocentric fashion influencers purposefully use modernised Afrocentric fashion designs to enhance their personal brands, and secondly, to explore whether the use of these designs in personal brands, apart from being used for professional/commercial

purposes, also fulfil personal and social needs. In-depth interviews will be conducted with young urban South Africans who represent active/overt personal brands, and who use modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols in their clothing choices to build their own personal brands.

#### Study Procedure:

Your expected time commitment to this study is one and a half hours. The researcher will ask a series of questions according to her interview structure and your responses will be digitally recorded to facilitate an accurate transcription of the information gathered.

#### Risks:

The risks of this study are minimal and are similar to those you experience when disclosing work-related information to others. The topics in the survey are personal. You may decline to answer any or all questions and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose.

#### Benefits:

There will be no direct benefit to you for your participation in this study. However, the researcher hopes that the information obtained will build on the current knowledge available on the topic and so increase insight into this area, not only academically, but also in the fashion industry.

#### Confidentiality:

Your comments will be anonymous and participants will not be referred to by name.. You will also be offered access to the interview transcripts after your interview, as well as access to the study after completion. The researcher will request Vega to store the transcripts for five years. They will be locked in a secure place on the campus. After five years, they will be destroyed.

#### Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you can decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part in the study, you will be requested to sign a consent form. After you have given consent, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without providing a reason.

You are also free not to answer any question or questions if you choose. This will not affect the relationship you have with the researcher.

#### Unforeseeable Risks:

There may be risks that are not anticipated. However, every effort will be made to minimise any risks.

#### Costs to participant:

There are no costs involved for your participation in this study.

#### Compensation:

There is no monetary compensation to you for your participation in this study.

CONFIRMATION OF RECEIPT OF THIS LETTER:

**SIGNED:**

**DATE:**

## APPENDIX B - CONSENT FORM



### CONSENT FORM

#### **AN EXPLORATION OF THE MOTIVATIONS FOR USING MODERNISED AFROCENTRIC FASHION DESIGNS TO ESTABLISH PERSONAL BRANDS**

By signing this consent form, I confirm that I have read and understood the information presented in the Introductory letter, I have had the opportunity to ask questions and I consent to partake in the Independent Institute of Education's research study specified above. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without providing a reason and without cost. I acknowledge that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I take note that the transcriptions of the interviews and audio recordings will be stored on a password protected computer and hard copy data will be stored in a storeroom at the Independent Institute of Education's Vega campus for a period of five (5) years. After this time, hard copy data will be shredded and electronic data will be deleted.

I voluntarily agree to take part in the following aspects of this study:

| I consent to the following | Yes | No |
|----------------------------|-----|----|
|----------------------------|-----|----|

|                                                                                                               |  |  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|
| Participation in an in-depth interview                                                                        |  |  |
| Audio recording during the interview                                                                          |  |  |
| Transcriptions of the recordings of the interview by the interviewer                                          |  |  |
| The data provided in this interview may be used by Erika Butetsi Bugaari Balintulo in future research studies |  |  |

PARTICIPANT NAME:.....

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE:..... **DATE:**.....

## APPENDIX C – INTERVIEW STRUCTURE



### INTERVIEW STRUCTURE

#### Research question

What are the motivations of a selection of 20-30 year old urban South Africans who represent active/overt personal brands, for purposefully choosing modernised Afrocentric fashion designs to establish and reinforce their personal brands?

#### Research sub-question

Apart from using personal brands for professional/commercial purposes, does the use of modernised Afrocentric fashion designs for personal brands also fulfil personal or social needs?

1. What does the term *Afrocentric fashion/clothing* mean to you?
2. Why is your own personal brand important to you and why do you use Afrocentric fashions to build and establish it?
3. Do you think the modernisation of Afrocentric fashion has made it more wearable and why?
4. Did you grow up being exposed to traditional and more modernised Afrocentric fashion?
5. Do you know the specific meanings behind the Afrocentric symbols as they appear on the fabrics?

6. Do you wear Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs to look different or is there a conscious symbolic meaning behind your choice of dress?
7. Does your clothing choice reflect some sort of political/cultural association?
8. Where do you purchase your Afrocentric fashions and why? Would you buy from an online store located outside Africa, and if not, why?
9. Do you associate and identify with other like-minded people who wear the same type of clothing or do you specifically use it to stand out from the crowd?
10. What are your thoughts on international designers borrowing African motifs for their designs?
11. Do you believe that Afrocentric fashion should be preserved for people of African heritage?
12. Do you believe that the modernisation of Afrocentric fashion symbols originated in Africa, to make clothes that are more appealing to the West, or did it originate in the West to make African clothes more wearable by the masses?
13. Do you think the modernisation of Afrocentric fashion symbols has diluted cultural meaning attached to the garments?
14. What do you think is portrayed by your clothing and personal brand regarding your personality?
15. Apart from face-to-face interactions, does social media engagement contribute towards the portrayal of your personal brand and your choice to engage with modernised Afrocentric fashion symbols and designs.
16. Do you use social media to increase social interaction for non-commercial and personal purposes and social gratification or for networking and marketing purposes?
17. Do you think the release of the movie, *Black Panther*, has played a role in more individuals identifying themselves through wearing Afrocentric fashion?

## APPENDIX D - ETHICS CLEARANCE FORM

### APPENDIX D



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7 April 2017

Student name: Erika Gutesi Bugezi

Student number: 1 M29051

Campus: Vega Cape Town



**Re: Approval of Master of Arts in Creative Brand Leadership (MACBS11) Proposal**

Thank you for the resubmission of your proposal entitled:



**THE MODERNISATION OF AFROCENTRIC FASHION SYMBOLS AND THEIR ROLE IN PERSONAL BRAND BUILDING**



We are pleased to inform you that the Research and Postgraduate Committee considered and has approved your research proposal. Ethics clearance has also been granted.



The Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee made some further suggestions which can assist you with your study. These should be attended to under the guidance of your supervisor.



The Committee confirms that Dr Linda Vorster has been appointed as your supervisor.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the campus staff or your supervisor directly.

All the best with your research.



Yours sincerely,

Dr Franziska du Preez-Cilliers  
Head of Faculty: Humanities



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## APPENDIX E

**TABLE 2: ORDER OF IMPORTANCE - CATEGORIES**

| CATEGORY                                                    | IMPORTANCE |         |                            |                             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------|---------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                                                             | Some       | Average | Very                       | Extremely                   |
| IDENTITY<br>(Africanism, self- expression)                  |            |         |                            | X<br>Mentioned 120<br>times |
| PRIDE<br>(Celebration, Beauty)                              |            |         |                            | X<br>Mentioned 98<br>times  |
| LANGUAGE<br>(Communication, Meaning of<br>cultural symbols) |            |         | X<br>Mentioned 77<br>times |                             |
| UNITY (Social Inclusion,<br>Advancement of Africanism)      |            |         | X<br>Mentioned 60<br>times |                             |

Table 2: Order of Importance – Categories.